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SOURYA SITARAMAN



DINDODIA

COVER: Sivaratri night in India and the temple is illuminated. Above: The Portuguese desecrated the glorious temple of Elephanta in 1535 with bullets; then in 1875 the Prince of Wales hosted this pompous luncheon, complete with meat and wine, inside the sacred cavern.

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2010 • HINDU YEAR 5112

VIKRITHA, THE YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION

Bodhinatha Veylanawami www.gurudeva.org

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There can be no peace on earth until we stop all killing: all life should be regarded as sacred.
—Dada J.P. Vaswani

To live as Hindus, we must demonstrate maturity, understanding and compassion.
—Swami Mayatitananda



Join the Hindu delegation at the largest interfaith gathering ever held... page 18



Healing the Earth is possible by exchange of ideas and restoring spiritual values.
—Sri Chandra Kali Prasada Mataji



Help to create a new world by worshiping, respecting and listening to Mother Nature.
—Swami Sandeep Chaitanya



Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Svarupa

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GLOBAL DHARMA

GLOBAL

Taking Ahimsa to the Masses

DURING THE PARLIAMENT of the World's Religions, Swamini Mayatitananda (below) launched a two-year global tour of satsangs called "Living Ahimsa—The Power of Peace" satsangs. At each of these gatherings, Mother Maya, as she is



affectionately known, speaks passionately on the vow of non-violence and conducts a guided meditation. Participants then create a Peace Mandala of grains and legumes while reciting: "I take the Vow of Ahimsa. I make inner harmony my first priority. I take the Vow of Ahimsa in my thoughts, speech and action."

It is an inspiring and powerful program, participants affirm. The Living Ahimsa Vrata mission makes the spirit of nonviolence a palpable reality for individuals. On the goals page of her website (www.mypeacevow.com), she Mother Maya explains: "This program arouses personal awareness and thereby creates an instant shift into global consciousness. The intention of this work is to heal millions



Brisbane, Australia: After listening to Mother's discourse and enjoying a guided meditation, participants create a Peace Mandala

of lives; transforming disease, poverty and despair into health, harmony and prosperity." The "Living Ahimsa—The Power of Peace" program was inaugurated in 2001, just after 9/11. So far, over 143,956 have taken the vow. The vow can be taken in person or online. Central to the vow is a thirty-minute meditation twice a day. Aum is chanted 108 times, two times, followed by

contemplation on key Hindu Vedic verses. "This commitment," Mother Maya writes on her website, "provides you with an instant spiritual awareness to filter all of your choices. Before you endeavor any major decision or goal, ask yourself the imperative Living Ahimsa question: 'Does this decision or choice support inner harmony?'"

DIASPORA ISSUES

Challenges For Hindus Outside India

FOUR SPEAKERS AT A HINDU intrafaith panel at the Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) touched on key issues facing Hindus in non-Hindu nations. Following a Vedic chant by Sri Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the panel moderator, opened by citing three key phenomena: growing populations of Hindus outside India, temple building and the identity crisis faced by youth who are isolated, often the sole Hindu in their class.

Swami Shankarananda, a leading teacher of Kashmir Saivism in the lineage of Baba Muktananda, whose ashram is in Australia, raised issues relating to Westerners who have

adopted Hinduism but who resist identifying themselves as Hindus. He pointed out, "Even though they don't call themselves Hindus, they are part of the same dharma body. But if we Western Hindus can't decide on who we are, then we don't have a voice. If we can say who we are, then we can be together and have a voice." In contrast, he noted, Western Buddhists are proud to call themselves Buddhists.

Akila Ramarathinam, the Joint General Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Australia, spoke eloquently about the cultural gap among Hindu communities in the West, lacking the immersion experience of India's culture and the extended family. She also stressed the need for Hindus to be proactive in education. She cited the VHP's amazing gamut of successful educational programs in Australia and its struggles to find staff and funding to maintain them.

The third speaker was Suhag Shukla, co-founder, legal counsel and managing director for the



Left to right: Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Swami Shankarananda, Paramacharya Palaniswami, Sri Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji, Akila Ramarathinam and Suhag Shukla

Hindu American Foundation (HAF). Suhag spoke passionately about the need for Hindus to be strong advocates in the public forum. "Defining who we are and where we stand in the West is of the utmost importance—because if we don't, someone else will. Hindus in the diaspora need to proactively participate in the public square and take ownership of our beliefs. If we don't, Hindus will continue to be misunderstood or misconstrued or have others try to speak on our

behalf, leading to portrayals that are completely divorced from actual belief and practice." Paramacharya Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief of HINDUISM TODAY, urged Hindus to fearlessly engage in open dialog with the media in their communities and take a stand on how Hinduism is portrayed. He shared recent initiatives by the HINDUISM TODAY staff: festival pagers and Hindu history lessons that are targeting the US educational system and mainstream media.

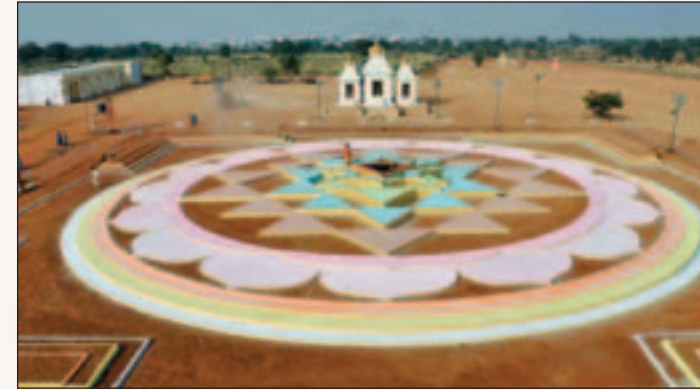
INDIA

Giant Chakra Peace Homa

SRI SRI SRI SADGURU SHAKTI Swaroopananda Maharaj conducted a 21-day Maha Homa (fire ceremony) in Sri Chakra Yantra for Global Peace in December, 2009, in Maheshwaram on the outskirts of Hyderabad.

The homa was performed daily, morning and evening, followed by bhajans and satsang. An estimated ten thousand people participated in the event.

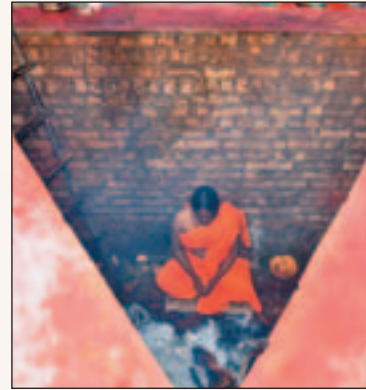
Homa organizers declared, "The Sri Chakra Yantra has a special immense power and is supreme among all other yantras.



Worship of Sri Chakra brings good fortune, well-being, good profits, good health and all manner of prosperity. Maha Homa in Sri Chakra Yantra is an auspicious event for the welfare and well-being of all people."

The 150 wide, 22,400 sq. ft.,

three-dimensional image of the renowned Sri Chakra was built by 100 engineers and 1,000 sevaks (volunteer workers) in just ten days. Organizers note that a replica of Sri Chakra this large has never been created anywhere before.



Climbing into the yagna pit to start the fire, Sri Sri Sri Sad-guru Shakti Swaroopananda Maharaj conducted the 3-hour homa twice daily for 21 days, starting each morning at 6am. The homa was repeated each evening from 5 to 8pm.

MEDIA

Media Leaders Speak on Religion

ANOTHER NOTABLE PANEL AT the Parliament in Melbourne comprised media representatives from three faiths who spoke on religion in the media. BBC's Religious Affairs Correspondent, Christian theologian Christopher Landau, explained the BBC's unique position of being state owned. Not bound by commercial mandates, the BBC is able to give broad coverage of religious and cultural landscapes that go beyond the fantastic and bizarre.

Ahmed Rehab is an American Muslim activist and writer with a focus on contemporary social issues, including civil rights, media relations and Islam-West relations. He discussed

the challenges facing moderate Muslims who cannot ignore the problem of fundamentalist Muslim terrorists, but at the same time must be careful not to add fuel to racial profiling and anti-Islamic stereotypes.

Paramacharya Palaniswami, editor-in-chief of HINDUISM TODAY, engaged the audience with a graphically rich presentation of the Hinduism's history in the US media. He took viewers from the early 1900s—when India was lampooned and swamis were feared—to today, when successful Hindus in the West are applauded, yoga and Hindu beliefs permeate the media, and a positive India adorns the cover of *Time* magazine.



Speakers field questions from the audience at a rare, if not first-ever, panel of media leaders from three different religions



Thailand is renowned for its beautiful stamp issues. Collectors can get these "Hindu God" stamps at ThaiStampShop.com



THAILAND

Siam's Inspiring Godly Stamps

THOUGH THAILAND'S OFFICIAL religion is Buddhism, like most of Southeast Asia, its history is interwoven with Hindu culture and religion. Highlighting this fact in June, 2009, the Thai government released a, edition of stamps depicting the Hindu Deities Ganesha, Brahma, Narayana and Siva. Designed by Mrs. Veena Chantanat of the Thailand Post Company

Limited and printed in France, the stamps have brought delight to Hindus in Asia and around the world. In an era when nation states' religious affiliations are often sources of conflict, these stamps tell a different story. The Buddhist Thai people are proud of the place that India and Hinduism have in the heritage of the rich and colorful Thai culture and tradition.



BRAZIL—TV

India Meets Brazil

WITH ITS PLOT IMMERSED in Hindu-Indian culture, the Brazilian television series *Ways to India* was chosen the best 2009 soap opera at the 37th International Emmy Awards in New York in November, 2009. Written by Gloria Perez and broadcast by TV Globo, it surpassed French and Philippine productions. It was a first-of-its-kind achievement for Brazil.

Airing one hour nightly six times a week from January to September, it had top ratings for 2009, with 150 million viewers, putting *Ways to India* among Brazil's all-time most popular TV shows. By comparison, the most viewed show in USA's TV history only had 106 million viewers. TV Globo has already licensed it to 80% of Latin America.

At a cost of US\$247,000 dollars per episode, the team filmed the first scenes of the show in the Indian cities of Jaipur and Agra. Besides a 40-member crew that the production took to India, Director Marcos Schechtman

also hired the help of an Indian producer. It took 15 months of hard work to produce the series, from research for the characterizations to actual film.

The director turns the state of Rajasthan into a melting pot of North and South India cultures to serve as a backdrop for a soap opera story of forbidden love. Caste, family reputation, arranged marriages, the intrinsic relationship between conduct and beliefs and various media stereotypes about India all provide a rich background for romantic intrigue.

The cliché story involves Maya Meetha (Juliana Paes), a girl from a high Rajasthan business caste, and Bahuan (Márcio Garcia), a successful businessman, educated in the US, who hides his status as Dalit, or untouchable. Maya's family requests the help of a brahmin Pandit (José de Abreu) to arrange a marriage for her. He introduces Raj (Rodrigo Lombardi). The love triangle is complete.



Left to right: Emmy Awardees Juliana Paes, Gloria Perez (writer), Marcos Schechtman (director); Stars—Raj (Rodrigo Lombardi), Maya (Juliana Paes), Bahuan (Márcio Garcia). Below: Pandit (José de Abreu).

But, wait! There's more! Bahuan has business in Brazil, and Raj falls in love with a Brazilian girl. The plot thickens with many twists and flights back and forth between India and Brazil. The brahmin is responsible to uphold the values of the



East (India) which are portrayed in conflict with those of the West (Brazil). But he also spreads gossip and demands more and more money for his services.

Gloria Perez, the show's

celebrated author, says that exposing Indian culture and religion to a Brazilian audience, while exploring differences and similarities, is a form of reflection. "The clothing, the religious rituals, the dances, the festivals and the magical aspects of India always have a counterpart in Brazil. There are two central stories being told, each on a different side of the world; they work as a mirror to each other."

Setting aside the shallow, fragmented portrayal of Hinduism, *Ways to India* has brought Brazilians a whole new view of India and its culture. Before its airing, the average Brazilian knew little or nothing of such matters. The meaning and importance of women's clothes, the immense popularity of Hindu Gods, such as Krishna and Ganesha, were but vague impressions. Now, Indian culture and fashion are on center stage in Brazil.

BY ELISANGELA MENDONÇA
RIO DE JANEIRO (BRAZIL)

Museum have unearthed thousands of artifacts at the site of the ancient village of Vinh Yen in the south-central province, some of which are 2,000–2,500 old. The findings include a Siva lingam made of rock crystal.

ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2009, Maharashtra-based Shree Sampraday sect reconverted 1,747 tribals who had embraced Christianity back to Hinduism

in Surat. At a havan conducted by ten priests, the participants were given *gurumantra* and *janai* (sacred thread) to mark their reconversion.

TO MEET THE 2010 KUMBHA MELA demand for flowers, the Uttarakhand Horticulture Department distributed over 1 million flowering plant saplings to farmers and allocated 4,565 hectares (11,275 acres) for flower farming.



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

A Vision of Inclusiveness

President Obama's inaugural address set forward a new paradigm for religious harmony in America

BY A SEEM SHUKLA

THE FOLLOWING ESSAY was my response in the *Washington Post* to their question, "What was the most important religion story of 2009?"

President Barack Obama at his inauguration in January, 2009, said: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth....[we] believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace."

With those words, bracketing Christians with Hindus and Muslims with nonbelievers, the President set an epochal tone of inclusiveness. Every religious tradition and those without faith could join together and share in a "common humanity." That was, to me, the year's most important religion story.

We are indeed a nation of diverse faiths and a faith in nothing at all. Hindus, now numbering two million, may have been included in this context for the first time, but the presidential intention is clear: our majority Christian nation is not a Christian nation; no religion occupies a place of privilege.

In 2005, the Hindu American Foundation was repulsed by Shirley Dobson's National Day of Prayer Task Force, when it sought to join celebrations throughout the country. This same task force joined with the likes of Focus on Family and others to enjoy official status and the aura of government sanction. Obama implied in his speech that the crass narcissism of these organizations was on the outs, and he came through this year. Ours is certainly a religious country, and this year, the National Day of Prayer belonged to all faiths, and so many of the most important days for every major religious tradition were celebrated by a sitting president for the



first time, from Ramadan to Diwali—a major religion story in its own right.

I've seen many interfaith councils, interfaith meetings, interfaith prayers proposed and countless have manifested. Certainly, religious leaders meet, say prayers in their holy tongues, and inspiring pictures are taken. But I've often felt that these become exercises in nothing more than spiritually

uplifting futility. For what is the fundamental basis of the meeting?

If religious leaders gather with the mind set that only they have the direct line to God, what is left to share? If an evangelical pastor comes together with a Sikh at an interfaith forum with the Biblical certainty that the person is an infidel or heathen doomed to hell, will the Sikh truly have an opportunity to share the greatness of Sikhism with a receptive partner? Understanding and tolerance are important, but are hollow concepts without the critical element of pluralism—defined as Hindu sages extolled a few millennia ago in the *Vedas*: "Truth is One, the wise know It by many names."

This is a critical point that should be the goal and common denominator for every sincere interfaith effort anywhere: to recognize that all religions are sacred and valid for their respective peoples. We believe that there is no inherent right embedded in any religion to denigrate or interfere with any other religion or with its practitioners.

Perhaps a Christian president of Muslim parentage is steeped in understanding that informed a presidency that has been truly pluralistic this year. Letting "old hatreds pass," asking "lines of tribe" to dissolve and building an inclusive, pluralistic America—realize all of this and we will usher in, no doubt, a "new era of peace."

ASEEM SHUKLA is Associate Professor, University of Minnesota medical school and co-founder of the Hindu American Foundation.

BRIEFLY...

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S Union Water Resources Ministry has finally accepted evidence collected by the Indian Space Research Organisation, Archaeological Survey of India, Geological Survey of India and other agencies, that prove beyond doubt the prior exis-

tence of the mighty river Saraswati that flowed through the Northwest region as described in Vedic literature. Until now, the government had denied the Saraswati's existence.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY INSTITUTE OF Vietnam and the Khanh Hoa



Can Everyone Benefit from Yoga?

While openly available, yoga is rooted in Hindu scripture, teaches Hindu practices and leads to oneness with God. Practice with caution!

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

ONE OF THE EVENTS WE WERE PRIVILEGED TO PARTICIPATE IN AT THE Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne was an interreligious panel entitled "Practicing Yoga: Covert Conversion to Hinduism or the Key to Mind-Body Wellness for All?" At this largest-ever interfaith gathering, many panels, including this one, focused on the interface of cultures and religions. With yoga becoming so popular in the world, it was a natural candidate for reflection, and the results were, as you will see, fascinating. The Parliament defined the issue and points of discussion thusly:

"The science of yoga has grown enormously on the global stage in the last few decades due to widespread recognition of its physical and mental health benefits. Hinduism teaches that yoga is comprised of eight steps, of which the popularly practiced postures are an integral part. Although yoga's origins are Hindu, its practitioners come from virtually all faiths. The United States alone has about 20 million practitioners, with hundreds of millions worldwide. However, the Hindu roots of yoga and the use of Hindu chants, such as the sacred syllable 'Om,' appear to have created apprehensions that the practice of yoga leads to de facto conversion to Hinduism. Yet, as a pluralistic, non-exclusivist and non-proselytizing religion, Hinduism teaches that one need not become a Hindu or repudiate one's own faith to practice yoga and reap its benefits. How founded is the fear of conversion? Is the practice of yoga inconsistent with the tenets of other religions? Can interfaith dialogue help individuals, irrespective of faith, reap the immense benefits that follow from the practice of yoga? The aim of this program is to foster understanding among faith traditions and to create a sustainable basis for the practice of yoga by all."

Rev. Ellen Grace O'Brian, Spiritual Director of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment and a minister in the kriya yoga tradition, moderated the panel discussion. Five panelists presented diverse viewpoints. Dr. Amir Farid Isahak, a practicing Malaysian Sufi, said that, in his interpretation, yoga can be practiced by Sufis without compromising their religion, provided they are careful about which practices they choose and as long as they focus on a goal of achieving proximity to God, but not unity. Professor Christopher Key Chapple shared information on the philosophical goals of yoga as expounded in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. He also spoke of the presence of yoga in Jainism and Buddhism, to demonstrate that long ago yoga moved beyond the boundaries of Hinduism.

Leigh Blashki of the Australian Institute of Yoga stressed that yoga practice should be not divorced from the spiritual disciplines that are its core. Suhag Shukla, a Hindu who grew up in the US and now a board member of the Hindu American Foundation, was adamant that yoga and its path of meditation are vital Hindu practices, integral to the religion. My presentation noted that today most popular yoga schools present yoga as a path of unitive mysticism, a meditative regimen that ultimately leads to experiencing the soul's oneness with God. Here is my summary of the issue.



GANGA SIVANATHAN

Yoga: Unitive Mysticism

The term *yoga* refers to a wide variety of Hindu practices. Therefore, it is always helpful when discussing yoga to modify the word with a second term to clarify what particular kind of yoga is being discussed. The yoga that is the subject of this panel is commonly referred to as *ashtanga* yoga. *Ashta* means eight, and *anga* means limb. The idea is that this system of yoga comprises eight progressive practices. Sage Patanjali is credited with being the first person to present the ancient tradition of yoga in a systematic way. He did this in his *Yoga Sutras*, a famous literary work thought to date back as far as 200 bce. For simplicity, when I use the word *yoga* in this presentation, I am referring to *ashtanga* yoga.

Vamadeva Shastri, a respected author on yoga, astrology and ayurveda, rightly states that the meditative side of yoga is little known: "Yoga today is most known for its *asana* (yogic posture) tradition—the most popular, visible and outward form of the system. Buddhism, by comparison, is known as a tradition of meditation, as in the more popular forms of Buddhist meditation like Zen and Vipassana. Many people who have studied yoga in the West look to Buddhist teachings for meditation practices, not realizing that there



HINDUISM TODAY

are yogic and Vedantic forms of meditation which are traditionally not only part of the yogic system but its core teaching! In the *Yoga Sutras*, only three *sutras* out of two hundred deal with *asana*. The great majority deal with meditation, its theory and results."

To understand yoga's meditative aspect, it is helpful to look briefly at each of the eight limbs or categories of practice. The first limb is *yama*, the ethical restraints, of which the most important is *ahimsa*, noninjuriosness. The second limb is *niyama*, specific religious observances, including *puja* in one's home shrine and repeating mantras. The third limb is *asana*, the yogic postures that are so widely practiced as a regimen called *hatha* yoga. The remaining five limbs are all related to meditation: *pranayama*, breath control; *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal; *dharana*, concentration; *dhyana*, meditation; and *samadhi*, ecstasy, or oneness with God.

Sometimes it is said that the roots of yoga are Hindu. To develop this botanical metaphor more fully, I would affirm that, yes, the roots of yoga, its scriptural origins, are Hindu. But the stem of yoga, its practice, is also Hindu. The flower of yoga, mystical union, is also Hindu. In other words, yoga, in its full glory, is a vital part of modern Hinduism.

Yoga is practiced on a large scale in Hindu communities around the globe. The fact that yoga is also pursued by many non-Hindus does not negate it as a Hindu practice. Let's draw a parallel to Vipassana, the popular Buddhist meditative system. The practice of Vipassana by those who are not Buddhist does not lessen the fact that Vipassana is a Buddhist practice, not merely a practice that has its origins in Buddhism.

Can Non-Hindus Benefit from Yoga? Clearly, more and more people today, including adherents of other religions, are convinced that this is possible. Take, for example, the title of an opinion piece in an August 2009 edition of *Newsweek*: "We're All Hindus Now." The article quotes the view of Stephen Prothero, religion professor at Boston University, on the American propensity for "the divine-deli-cafeteria religion." He states: "You're not picking and choosing from different religions because they're all the same. It isn't about orthodoxy. It's about whatever works. If going to yoga works, great—and if going to Catholic mass works, great. And if going to Catholic mass plus the yoga plus the Buddhist retreat works, that's great, too."

Yoga panelists: (left to right) Rev Ellen Grace O'Brian of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment in San Jose, California; Suhag Shukla, Esq., legal counsel for the Hindu American Foundation; Professor Christopher Key Chapple of Loyola-Marymount University; Leigh Blashki, director of the Australian Institute of Yoga; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, publisher of *Hinduism Today* Magazine in Hawaii; Qigong and Reiki Master Dr. Amir Farid Isahak of Malaysia.

However, it is equally true that the leaders of some religions have spoken out strongly against the practice of yoga by their followers. For example, the Vatican has issued a number of warnings to Catholics about yoga over the years. In 1989 it warned that practices like Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer. Further, the Church leaders cautioned, "The love of God, the sole object of Christian contemplation, is a reality which cannot be 'mastered' by any method or technique."

In 2008 the leading Islamic council in Malaysia issued an edict prohibiting the country's Muslims from indulging in the practice of yoga, fearing its Hindu roots could corrupt them. The council's chairman, Abdul Shukor Husim, explained the decision: "We are of the view that yoga, which originates in Hinduism, combines a physical exercise, religious elements, chanting and worshiping for the purpose of achieving inner peace and ultimately to be at one with God. For us, yoga destroys a Muslim's faith. There are other ways to get exercise. You can go cycling, swimming."

In a search on the web, another informative example turned up. In 2001 the Reverend Richard Farr, vicar of St Mary's church in Henham, England, made a decision that became the talk of the Essex village and beyond: he banned a 16-strong group of yoga enthusiasts from taking lessons in his church hall. Yoga is, he said, an un-Christian practice: "I accept that for some people it is simply an exercise. But it is also often a gateway into other spiritualities, including Eastern mysticism."

The Christian and Muslim leaders we cite as examples stated no concerns that the practice of yoga might result in conversion to Hinduism. However, all three expressed the concern that yoga



practice is in conflict with the tenets of their religions. As Abdul Husim expressed it, "Yoga destroys a Muslim's faith."

This predictably raises the question, "What are the tenets of yoga?" We find an authoritative answer in the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the most renowned modern teachers of yoga. His system, known as Iyengar Yoga, is widely popular, as evidenced by the thousands of teachers listed on his website. There, in answer to his most frequently asked question, "What is yoga?" he states, "Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means 'union.' On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self. Sage Patanjali penned down this subject in his treatise known as *Yoga Sutas*."

Another popular yoga teacher, Bikram Choudhury, founder of Bikram Yoga, defines it in a similar way on his website, stating that yoga means union of the Individual Soul (Atman) with the Universal Soul (Brahman). He states, "*Atman* and *Brahman* are Hindu ideological terms that are used as a reference for the mind, whereas there

truly is only Oneness."

Clearly, it is not just its specific practices, such as chanting the mantra "Om," that make yoga Hindu. It is the philosophy itself. The fact that the goal of yoga philosophy is mystical experience—or, more precisely, a mystical experience of the oneness of the soul with God—is the most central attribute that makes it inherently Hindu.

Conclusion: It is naive to take yoga as a physical system of exercise devoid of its philosophical, spiritual and cultural underpinnings. This profound spiritual discipline is ineluctably rooted in Hindu scripture. It is a path of religious practice on all levels, and its goal is enlightenment, Self Realization. It may not be an advisable practice for followers of religions in which unitive mysticism is unacceptable, as stated by the religious leaders of such faiths. Those who are affiliated with liberal religions and those with no formal religious ties can definitely benefit from the practice of yoga, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. However, a caution to all who follow the path of yoga: be prepared to become gradually more and more aware of the unity of all that exists!

Yoga Is One of the Six Classical Hindu Philosophies

Among the most compelling facts supporting the profound association of yoga with Hinduism is its place as one of the six foundational philosophical systems that

have been studied and debated for nearly a millennia. Here is a thumbnail sketch of those schools, known in Sanskrit as the Shad Darshanas ("six perspectives").

There are hundreds of Hindu darshanas of which six have been distinguished: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. Each was tersely formulated in sutra form by its "founder," and elaborated in extensive commentaries by other writers. These systems are varied attempts at describing Truth and the path to it. Elements of each form part of the Hindu mosaic today.

Nyaya: "System, rule; logic." A system of logical realism, founded sometime around 300bce by Gautama, known for its systems of logic and epistemology and concerned with the means of acquiring right knowledge. Its tools of enquiry and rules for argumentation were adopted by all schools of Hinduism.

Vaisheshika: "Differentiation," from vishesha, "differences." A philosophy founded by Kanada (ca 300bce) teaching that liberation is to be attained through understanding the nature of existence, which is classified in nine basic realities (dravyas): earth, water, light, air, ether, time, space, soul and mind. Nyaya and Vaisheshika are viewed as a complementary pair, with Nyaya emphasizing logic, and Vaisheshika analyzing the nature of the world.

Sankhya: "Enumeration, reckoning." A



philosophy founded by sage Kapila (ca 500bce), author of the *Sankhya Sutas*. Sankhya is primarily concerned with "categories of existence," tattvas, which it understands as 25 in number. The first two are the unmanifest Purusha and the manifest primal nature, Prakriti—this male-female polarity is viewed as the fundament of all existence. Prakriti, out of which all things evolve, is the unity of the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The Sankhya and Yoga schools are considered an inseparable pair. Their principles permeate all of Hinduism.

Yoga: "Yoking; joining." The ancient tradition of philosophy and practice codified by Patanjali (ca 200bce) in the *Yoga Sutas*. It is also known as *raja* yoga, "king of yogas," or *ashtanga* yoga, "eight-limbed yoga." Its object is to achieve, at will, the cessation of all fluctuations of consciousness, and the attainment of Self Realization. Yoga is wholly dedicated to putting the high philosophy of Hinduism into practice, to achieve personal transformation through transcendental experience, samadhi.

Mimamsa: "Inquiry" (or Purva, "early," Mimamsa). Founded by Jaimini (ca 200bce), author of the *Mimamsa Sutas*, who taught that the correct performance of Vedic rites is the means to salvation.

Vedanta: "End (or culmination) of the *Vedas*" (sometimes termed Uttara "later" Mimamsa). For Vedanta, the main basis is the *Upanishads* and *Aranyakas* (the "end," *anta*, of the *Vedas*), rather than the hymns and ritual portions of the *Vedas*. The teaching of Vedanta is that there is one Absolute Reality, Brahman. Man is one with Brahman, and the object of life is to realize that truth through right knowledge, intuition and personal experience. The *Vedanta Sutas* (or *Brahma Sutas*) were composed by Rishi Badarayana (ca 400bce).



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You can ensure their heritage and religion are understood by those around them.

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LETTERS

Thank You

I send my heartfelt greetings to you for publishing such a wonderful magazine. Living so far from our mother country, we have HINDUISM TODAY to keep us related to our precious roots. I am a therapist, healer and spiritualist, as is my husband. The magazine is a treat to our heart and soul.

KAMAL SANDHU
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Stop Conversion

I was very disturbed and angry after reading the article by Sri Maruthu Pandian Dharma-lingam, "Friendship Evangelism," in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009 issue. Christians trying their very best to convert people of other religions has been a thorn in the flesh of all Hindus for hundreds of years. While Maruthu took a firm stand against their efforts, we have many others falling prey to conversion.

These Christian evangelists are paid and well trained in the art of conversion. They even manage to penetrate into families very comfortable with Hinduism. It is estimated 15 Hindus a day convert to Islam or Christianity here in Malaysia. Just imagine, 850,000 Christians actively involved in trying to convert 1.7 million Hindus, and they are gaining ground. Every Hindu should wonder why we easily fall victim to conversion. Hindus proud of their beloved religion would never convert, as Hinduism is the best religion around.

There are some things we can do to check conversions. 1) Parents should bring their children to the temples often; 2) Parents should be able to explain the basics of Hinduism to their children; 3) Teenagers should be taught that while love may be blind, it must have the brains to understand that a trap may be set for conversion. Inter-marriages should only be accepted if the Christian boy or girl agrees to embrace Hinduism; and 4) the various Hindu organizations should band together and confront the churches, demanding they stop this conversion game.

K. THURUVAN
SEREMBAN, MALAYSIA

Bhutanese Refugees

Your story on the Bhutanese refugees is very well done (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010). The article educated everyone about these Hindu refugees. Sewa International has undertaken a big challenge, and I am helping them in Houston.

VIJAY K. PALLOD
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I was very happy to see the detailed coverage on the plight of Bhutanese Hindus in

your Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010, issue. I was notified in 2007 about the plight of a few Bhutanese in Atlanta. I was then the president of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta. I contacted Sewa International, who adopted the community as part of their national campaign. The Atlanta community continues to network with several organizations, including volunteers from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), to help the nearly 2,500 Bhutanese in Atlanta.

P. RAVI SARMA
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The excellent article by Prof. Sreenath (In My Opinion, Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010 added color to the main article of the issue on the sad plight and future hope of the Bhutanese Hindu refugees. The front cover picture speaks of the innocence of these unfortunate brethren, but with the grace of the Lord, I am of the humble view that the future will be a friendly and bright one. Unity in diversity!

THIRU SATKUNENDRAN
TORONTO, CANADA

Christmas or Kalpa Vriksha?

I live in the USA. My five-year-old son, Aravind, asked for a Christmas tree this year for the first time. My wife bought one despite my protest. I can understand my son's desire to get one, as my neighbors have beautifully lit up trees in the lawn. Naturally, celebrating Christmas is a popular topic in the school during this month.

But I did not want to let it go that easily. I recalled a conversation that I had with my friend about Kalpa Vriksham, the wish-fulfilling tree of Hindu lore, and the Christmas tree. This solved my problem forever. I immediately told my son to call the tree Kalpa Vriksham instead. It took a couple of tries for him to learn it, but he got it easily as he is already exposed to tongue-twisting Sanskrit words in Chinmaya Mission's children's classes. From now on we are doing "Kalpa Vriksham Celebrations" on Dec 25.

Sri Bal Gangadhar Tilak introduced a Ganesh festival in Mumbai to increase unity among Hindus, so there is a precedent. We need a solid solution to this issue. The parents need one that makes the children happy without hurting any religious sentiments. The children need it to avoid separation from friends in the school. In December, the schools are closed, the offices are closed and people are shopping. A festival atmosphere is all set for us; we just have to celebrate in our own way.

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✓ *Hinduism Today's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, developed a similar solution—see page 58 of this issue for his modern festival of Pancha Ganapati*

Making a Choice Against Silk

Many thanks to HINDUISM TODAY for exposing the cruelty behind silk production (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010). I had to get used to ridicule and harassment when I made a conscious decision not to wear silk saris or anything made out of silk many years ago. Many people around me did not understand why I did not wear silk. My decision even became a joke to some. Now I am so happy that someone took the time and effort to write about the cruelty that goes hand in hand with silk production. It is like a life saver, an external validation of what I learned from my mother, who always chose cotton over silk and talked to me from a very early age about the cruelty in silk production. All the silk worms really appreciate this article.

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Chinmaya Acharya Program

Even before I got to see my Chinmaya Mission article in the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010, issue, people from all over North America were emailing me saying how wonderful and visually appealing the article was. Thank you for the opportunity to share the great work Chinmaya Mission is doing as well as all your hard work to make this happen.

ACHARYA VIVEK
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Hindu Climate Declaration

This is in response to your newsletter announcing that the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change was adopted at the Parliament of the World's Religions (see page 21 of this issue). I hasten to congratulate the Hindu leaders on adopting this declaration while the world's country leaders are assembled in Copenhagen to reach a consensus on climate change issues and actions.

Living in harmony with Mother Nature is not new to Hindus. Over centuries of time, Hindus are following a tradition of holding the five elements—air, water, earth, fire and ether—in great reverence. This ancient and glorious tradition is getting greatly diluted due to the impact of several dramatic changes taking place globally. Increasing pressures caused by rapid urbanization, energy-guzzling industries and demanding lifestyles are

pushing people to face formidable environmental challenges.

There are many ways to address the issue of climate change. Reducing the electricity demand through programs like Demand-Side Management (DSM) or making more use of renewable energy is one option. The other, and more effective one, is a change in lifestyle to avoid waste and adoption of more efficient ways of using energy in homes and workplaces—what may be called "low-carbon diet" programs. This approach can help to cut carbon footprints on the world.

As an expert on energy efficiency and environmental improvement techniques, I can provide specific help to such of our members who may be interested in combating climate change.

SUNDARESAN SUBRAMANIAN
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I am extremely glad that the global Hindu community has produced a consensual statement for the COP15. It is quite similar to the presentation of mine given a year ago at the first Gulf of Mannar, Ram Sethu, Conference at the historic Linnean Society of London, UK. The theme was "The Gulf of Mannar as a World Heritage Site and its Spiritual and

Scientific Relevance to the Earth's Changing Climate." I am congruent with the consensual statement you all have jointly come up with. Jointly you may wish to refine it to deliver the desirable impact and elicit the desirable change.

ANANT VYAS
UNITED KINGDOM
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At Press Time: S. Rajam Passes

By our Editor-in-Chief: We first met S. Rajam back in 1995 in Chennai, South India, having seen his amazing illustrations in a book, *Periya Puranam*. The art looked so elegant, but also so ancient and traditional. It was the only authentic South Indian art form we had ever seen. Perhaps it was done a century ago? Two? We inquired and, to our delight, found the artist was not only alive but just a few miles away. Thus began fifteen years of collaboration. S. Rajam, though in his 80s, painted for us tirelessly, producing hundreds of works that appear on the covers of all of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's books and many of our HINDUISM TODAY covers and articles (see pages 66 and 70 of this issue). He once told us that in his youth he was talented, and full of callow ego, an ego that suffered

when he could not equal the great masters of yore in his artistic achievements. The budding master thought to travel to the origins of spiritual art—Sigiriya Caves in Sri Lanka, Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India and more. His goal: to learn how these monastics had achieved their rare skills. His finding: it was their consciousness, not their technique that made them great. Learning this, he set out to change his consciousness, and that ultimately informed his art. As good as his art was, and it was the best, he was more widely known as a composer and musician who promoted *vivadhi* ragas and popularized *kshetra kirthans*. He also acted in three films. We honor his life and his work, and are thankful that we have, here at our editorial offices, over 600 of his original canvases, spanning the decades from the 1940s onward. S. Rajam was 91 when he passed on January 29th.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or submitted at: www.hinduismtoday.com

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Helping Young Hindus Make their Way

How to give understanding, self confidence and pride

JAYSHREE RAO WAS born in Tanzania and lived there until she was seven years old. When her family moved to England, suddenly she was attending an English school. It was the beginning of a difficult period of her life that would last 13 years.

"At recess, someone would throw out a question or comment about our culture, and I had no idea how to respond. Whenever conversations turned to cows, caste, arranged marriages or vegetarianism, I had this awful, sinking feeling. I grew up vegetarian, but how to explain it, I had no idea. The questions were sometimes friendly, often not. Either way, I was on the spot. When the media made one of those horrid reports about something Indian, I would cringe, knowing tomorrow at school the weight of the world would once again come down on my shoulders—which weren't very strong.



"My hope is that they will experience the same joy I felt."
Ms. Jayshree Rao at home in Manchester.

I learned to clam up. Some people were supportive, and I am grateful to them, but the culture gap remained, and it was painful.

"Then, when I was in my early twenties, around 1982-83, all these negatives turned into one big positive. HINDUISM TODAY came into my life. It lifted my spirits and changed me altogether.

Here was my culture in English (a rarity, back then). And here were my answers—intelligent, smartly presented—something I could show and be proud of. Questions lost their power to scare me, and became welcome opportunities instead. The prison wall around me fell, and—oh, joy!—I was free."

Jayshree, who lives with her family in Manchester, UK, has donated generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "I hope my humble gift will help our

magazine reach all those younger Hindus who are facing the same challenges I did. I pray they will discover HINDUISM TODAY early in their life and bypass a lot of confusion and pain. I hope they may recognize HINDUISM TODAY as a true friend, and make it an essential part of their lives, so they can see how proud and self-confident they can be when they begin to understand even just a little bit.

"I imagine a time when HINDUISM TODAY will have offices in many places in the world where especially younger people could come to meet the staff, and absorb how confident Hinduism is, how knowledgeable Hinduism is, understand how enlightened Hinduism is. I imagine this will happen, since the Production Fund also supports HINDUISM TODAY staff travels."

If, like Jayshree, you would like to help Hindu youth be self-confident and proud, please consider donating to the Production Fund or including it in your estate plan. Ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Or read more about the Production Fund and estate planning options at: www.hheonline.org/productionfund then click *planned giving options*. Or contact us at 808-634-5407 or hhe@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

Speak little. Speak sweetly.
Speak the truth at all costs.

Swami Sivananda (1887–1963), founder of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

A Swiss devotee visited Ramana Maharishi (1879–1950), the sage of Arunachala. She was disturbed from having a vision of Siva. “Is He not the Destroyer?” she asked. The mystic replied:

“Yes, He is the destroyer of sorrows. Siva is the embodiment of auspiciousness. Have you got a form? That is why you think of Siva’s form. The Self is bodiless. If you are with body, then Siva is with body. If you are not, He also is not.”

The end of ego is the mystic death of the meditator. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), founder of the Chinmaya Mission

The fragrance of the flower is never

borne against the breeze, but the fragrance of human virtues diffuses itself everywhere. **Ramayana**

Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened. *Anonymous*

As long as someone cries out “O God! O God!” be sure that he has not found God, for whoever has found Him becomes still. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

In the house of the seer there are five cows (the five senses), which without a cowherd wander everywhere. If they were controlled and their thirst quenched, they would give milk. **Tirumantiram**, a sacred mystical treatise by Rishi Tirumular (10th century CE).

We who have come from the East here have been told day after day in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous. We look about us and see England as the most prosperous nation in the world, with her foot on the neck of 250 million Asiatics. We look back in history and see Christian Spain’s wealth beginning with the invasion of Mexico. Such prosperity comes from cutting the throats of fellow men. At such a price the Hindu will not have prosperity. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902), disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, 1893

It is nauseating to see a seditious middle temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the Middle East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Vice-regal palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor! **Sir Winston Churchill** (1874–1965), British leader, referring to Mohandas K. Gandhi

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end they always fall—think of it, always. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. **Ian Fleming** (1908–1964), English writer

Today is the tomorrow you never thought about yesterday. *Anonymous*

Our prayers should be for blessings in general, for God knows best what is good for us. **Socrates**, (470–399 BCE) Greek philosopher

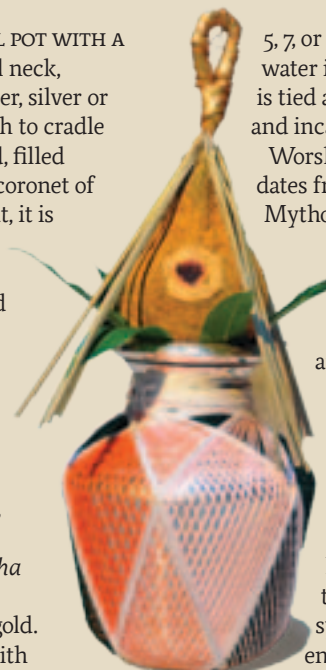
It is not wise to live in water and make an enemy of the crocodile. *Indian proverb*

DID YOU KNOW?

A Temporary Vessel for Divinity

A KALASHA IS A METAL POT WITH A large base and small neck, made of brass, copper, silver or gold, its mouth large enough to cradle a coconut. Ritually adorned, filled with water, topped with a coronet of mango leaves and a coconut, it is used as a temporary vessel for divinity. It holds the energy of the God or Goddess during puja, much as does a statue. In modern Hinduism, the kumbha can be used to represent any Deity.

The entire ritual arrangement, as illustrated, is called Purna-Kalasha or Purna-Kumbha. The *kalasha* is sometimes filled with coins, grain, gems or even gold. The mango-leaf coronet, with



HINDUISM TODAY

5, 7, or 11 leaves, touches the water inside. A sacred thread is tied around the metal pot and incantations are intoned.

Worship with Purna-Kumbha dates from the time of *Rigveda*. Mythologically, the *kalasha* temporarily contain *amrita*, the elixir of life, bringing abundance, wisdom and immortality.

Rich in mysticism and symbolism, the Purna-Kalasha is associated with the five elements in sacred scriptures; with elements of the human body, such as the head, hair, the nerve system and the subtle energy centers, or chakras.

Non Sequitur



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See yourself everywhere. You are the whole world. **Satguru Yogaswami** (1872–1964), Sri Lankan mystic

Nature cares nothing for logic, our human logic; she has her own, which we do not recognize and do not acknowledge until we are crushed under its wheel. **Ivan Turgenev** (1818–1883), Russian writer

All the world’s a stage, but we have missed the rehearsal. *Anonymous*

A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle. **Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790), scientist, philosopher and US founding father

The people I distrust most are those who want to improve our lives, but will accept only one course of action. **Frank Herbert** (1920–1986), American writer

Well, sir, I couldn’t repair your brakes, so I just made your horn louder. *Anonymous*

The practice of yoga is not for ourselves alone, but for the Divine; its aim is to work out the will of the Divine in the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down a divine nature into the life of humanity. It is not personal ananda, but the bringing down of the divine ananda, the Satya Yuga, upon the

Earth. **Sri Aurobindo**, (1872–1950), Indian philosopher and reformer

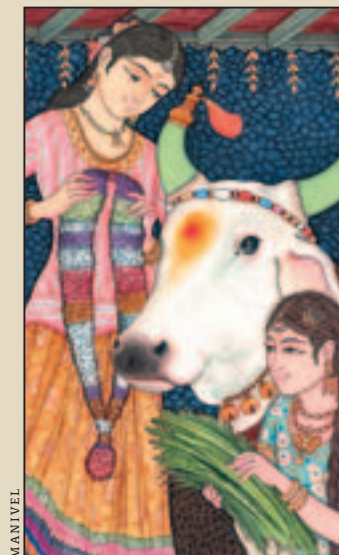
Everyone has willpower. It is inherent to the makeup of the physical-astral-mental-emotional body. The center of willpower is the *manipura* chakra, located at the solar plexus. Unlike other energies, the more willpower we use, the more willpower we have to use. This happens when we work a little harder than we think we can, do a little more than we think we can do. By putting forth that extra effort, we build up a great willpower that we will always have with us, even in our next life, the next and the next. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Vegetarianism, a Lifestyle of Reverence & Respect

VEGETARIANISM IS A NATURAL consequence of the principle of *ahimsa*, doing no harm. Plants, lacking nervous systems, do not endure the pain and terror that mortifies animals at slaughter. Hindus know that by injuring nature’s other creatures we become a source of pain and sorrow. Through a harmless life, we can be a source of healing and joy.

Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on vegetarianism. The *Yajur Veda* (36.18) calls for kindness toward all creatures living on the Earth, in the air and in the water. The *Tirukural*, a 2,200-year-old masterpiece of ethics, says, “When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he will abstain from eating it.” The *Manu Samhita* advises, “Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying

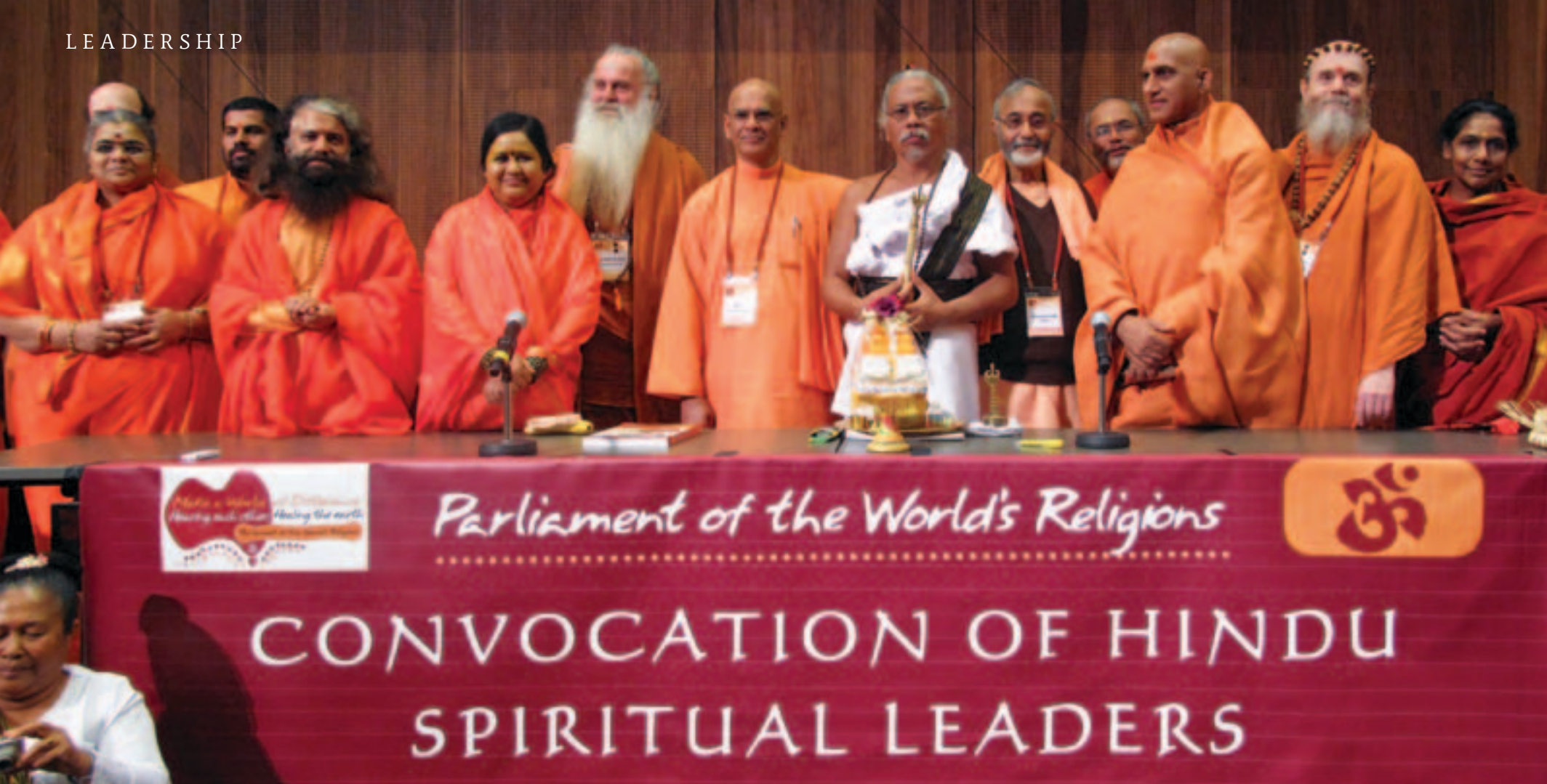


MANIVEL

corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh.” The yoga-infused verses of the *Tirumantiram* warn us, “The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death’s agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of the lower worlds.” Man’s appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on the Earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures.

India’s saints confirm that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Sattvic eating, a diet composed mostly of fruits, nuts and milk, is the most conducive to meditation, bringing happiness and paving the road to the realization of one’s Self.

The opposite of causing injury to others is to express compassion and love for all beings. Vegetarians, wielding noninjury as a principle of peace, are living reminders that humans should respect, and protect, every living being.



A Rare Intrafaith Gathering

Prominent Hindu swamis, acharyas and matas from around the world spoke out in consonance at the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS took place December 3–9, 2009, in Melbourne, Australia. Held every five years, this event brought together 6,000 people from over 200 faith traditions for what some said was “the best Parliament ever.” Members of local religious communities and interfaith groups from around the globe gathered with spiritual leaders, scholars and artists for a rich series of panels, lectures, workshops, dialogues, religious observances and meditations, cultural events, exhibits, films and plenaries.

Our publisher and two editors attended, speaking at six events, the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders being the most notable. The Parliament program staff brought together an international group of two dozen Hindu acharyas, *matas*, priests and

sacred dancers in a unique assembly, the likes of which has never occurred outside India. Hinduism was the only religion to have such a grand intrafaith gathering at the Parliament. Arguably, only the Hindus, who were represented substantially in the Parliament, could have pulled off such an event in which leaders of such diverse traditions gave messages from the personal depths of their mystical realizations, each resounding in perfect harmony with every other. At the meeting's culmination, our Editor-in-Chief read out a draft “Hindu Declaration on Climate Change” (see page 21), the result of a collaborative effort between Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, Dr. Arvind Sharma and the HINDUISM TODAY editorial team.

Following are excerpts from seven of the talks given at the Convocation.

Swami Avdheshanand Giri

Juna Peeth and Acharya Sabha, Uttarakhand
We have in our scriptures the best solutions available with which to face the problem of ecological imbalance today. This problem would not have arisen had we all committed ourselves to vegetarianism. Ecological problems, specifically global warming, have come about because of the world's nonvegetarian diet. The approach that we should take the maximum wealth available to us from nature, be it oil or metals, and that we should maximize our power with nuclear weapons—these also contribute to our global problems.

Our Hindu dharma has given us certain important values to implement in our day-to-day lives, including being satisfied with whatever we have. Learn to share, learn to give first, and then enjoy. This attitude will

bring about harmony in society.

I would also like to affirm with confidence that the Hindu tradition has never believed in proselytizing, has never worked to enhance the fold and bring people from other faiths to our faith so that we can be more. On the contrary, this is a tradition which has always cared for the growth and religious sensitivities of each and every individual—not only cared but helped them equally to grow individually. This is the greatest good deed, or *punya*, that one can do in one's life.

Today the absence of this attitude has created agitation and given rise to crime and imbalance in society. The attitude that I shall grow at the cost of others is considered improper in the Hindu religion. It is a great sin against ahimsa, the principle of nonviolence, to be insensitive to the rights and demands of others and to afflict pain or hurt on them—not only physically, but by hurting their religious sentiments, their belief systems.

Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami

Jeeyar Educational Trust, Andhra Pradesh
Man has always considered himself an evolved being and has focused more on the intellect than his physical well being. This has resulted in his aspiring for higher things.

Left to right: Yogini Sri Chandra Kali Prasada Mataji, Swami Sandeep Chaitanya, Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Amma Sri Karunamayi, Paramacharya Palaniswami, Swami Parameshananda, Ida Pedanda GK Sebali Tianyar Arimbawa, Swami Amarananda, Swami Paramatmanand, Swami Avdheshanand Giri, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Swami Mayatitananda Saraswati

The real purpose of being blessed with higher intellect should obviously make man lead a fair and charitable life, free from jealousy and hatred, considerate towards fellow beings and thus able to realize and surrender to God.

If religion and the higher purpose of the intellect go together, all of us as members of a huge global family live well, sharing love and affection. If religion does not help in controlling undesirable tendencies, then it becomes a poisonous weapon in the hands of self-centered men.

The paths taken by each religion may be different, but the final destination should be the same. We have to remember that some religions evolved in a particular region and period. The culture, traditions and environment in which they took root played a crucial role in determining their tenets. In some cases the doctrines one or another followed were radically different, and these differences in beliefs often lead to wars. If we are to coexist peacefully in this global village, we need to understand these differences and learn to respect the beliefs, practices and customs of others.

Every religion needs to view other religions empathetically and not attempt to dictate what others should and should not do. Neither should they attempt to allure the devotees of other religions through dubious perks, such as giving money and food. People should be allowed to practice their religion without being subjected to criticism, ridicule or torture by other religious people.

Yogini Sri Chandra Kali Prasada Mataji

Sri Kali Gardens Ashram, Andhra Pradesh
Hindu philosophy is based on the truth that there is one Supreme Power that is the sustaining force of the entire creation. Personal transformation starts with realization of this Supreme Power within one's own self. The aspirant will then be able to experience that power all around him. Thus he understands that this power is universal, nondual, indivisible and eternal. He sees unity in diversity. He will not see his fellow human beings as different from him and so does not fear. Such a person is full of compassion and unlimited love. He will work towards peace and prosperity of not only mankind but all of nature. This is accomplished only through faith and surrender to that Supreme Power and under the able guidance of the spiritual

teacher who is an embodiment of that power.

The guru gives various spiritual practices, like meditation, prayer, and religious observances to attain this goal. In man's quest for inner peace, he will try to keep an open mind so that he can better understand his fellow human beings by having an open dialogue. Healing the Earth is possible by exchanging ideas and restoring spiritual values. Peace is much needed in today's world. Unless each individual changes his behavior and thinking for his own progress and for the world at large, peace cannot be established.

Dada J.P. Vaswani

Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Maharashtra

It has seemed to me that there can be no peace on Earth, that there can be no peace among nations, until we stop all killing. Stop all killing! No sentient creature must be killed. We of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission have started the SAK Association—S stands for *stop*, A for *all*, K for *killing*. I invite you all to join this association. All every member is required to do is to see that he stops killing wherever he finds it. You may ask me why; for the simple reason that if I kill an animal for food, I will not hesitate in killing a fellow human being whom I regard as an enemy.

All life should be regarded as sacred, for there is but one life that flows into all. This one life sleeps in the mineral and the stone. This one life stirs in the vegetable and the plant. This one life dreams in the bird and the animal. This one life is awake in man.

Creation is one family, and in this one family of creation, birds and animals are man's younger brothers and sisters. It is the duty of every man to share the love of his heart with his younger brothers and sisters. It is the responsibility of man to save his younger brothers and sisters from the cruel knife of the butcher.

Just as women do not exist as resources for men, just as black people do not exist as resources for white people, even so animals do not exist as resources for human beings. Today, wherever I go, I hear of animal welfare. But animal welfare is not the answer. Animal rights are needed!

I believe this Parliament should come together and formulate a charter of animal rights and man's duties towards animals. Every animal has certain fundamental rights, and the very first right of every animal is the right to live. For you cannot take away that which you cannot give, and since you cannot give life to a dead creature, you have no right to take away the life of a living one.

Swami Mayatitananda

Mother Om Mission, North Carolina

A significant guiding principle of Hinduism is ahimsa, the universal dictum by which we embrace Mother Nature, all religions, cultures, people and life everywhere. To live as Hindus, we must demonstrate maturity, understanding and compassion—compassion that goes beyond tolerance—extending friendship to all traditions. We should not look to tolerate each other because of our differences, but to embrace each other. We should not only strive to accommodate our diverse ideologies but to understand them!

As Hindus, our expression must be free from *himsa* (hurtfulness), not only from the violence of wars, battles and conflicts, but more importantly the violence perpetrated through our thoughts, speech and action. For this, we must work to cultivate a spirit which is free from prejudice, narrow viewpoint and the attitude of entitlement. If each one of us makes a commitment to inner harmony, we will surely succeed in achieving the ultimate goal of our human destiny, that of a spiritual freedom that unites us. Ultimately, it is the work of awareness within the individual person that will change the world for the better.

To repair the violence in nature, we must first heal the violence within ourselves. To fix the violence in our communities, we must heal the disharmony among the various ancestral and faith traditions. There can be no perfect harmony on Earth until we eliminate the mind of violence. For this, we must heal dissonant, angry and prejudicial thinking. Every war, battle, fight and conflict began in the mind of a person. Toxic thoughts create *himsa*—cruelty, violence and insensitivity—which spills out of us, causing hurt and injury. My healing and your healing is pervasive energy that instantly touches the soul of the entire community, humanity and world.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati

Parmarth Niketan, Uttarakhand

Healing the Earth means what? Consume less, waste less, reduce, reuse, recycle, live a simple life. The problem is that nobody wants to live a simple life. The solution is that we must change our lifestyles.

If we are concerned, we have to listen to Mother Earth, we have to save the water, we have to save the air, we have to save our Earth and then only we can bring change. I was very impressed when our Dada said,

“Stop all killing.” This means being vegetarian. This is the only way, believe me, tomorrow, today and yesterday.

We don’t have to spend billions of dollars. We have to come to the conclusion that we have to do it, and we have to start now. We don’t have to wait. Vegetarianism is difficult. I know it’s not easy. But I can tell you vegetarianism is the future, the way. If you don’t want to stop today, even in cutting back to eating meat only once or twice a week, you will see the difference in your life and the life of the planet. We can do it.



RAY MESSNER



GANGA SIVA NATHAN

Soul-stirring: (top) Dada J.P. Vaswani implores us to “Stop all killing;” (above) Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami solemnly urges those of all faiths to respect each other

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Kauai’s Hindu Monastery, Hawaii

Speeches by world leaders emphasizing mutual respect—such as Kevin Rudd’s February, 2008, apology to Australia’s indigenous people and Barack Obama’s June, 2009, speech to Muslims in Egypt—are important, but, in and of themselves, are not enough to solve the problem of intolerance. Clearly the challenge is to get the message being given at the top about the need for mutual respect to the individual families that collectively comprise society, along with specific suggestions

for how they can implement this concept in their lives. That is where religious leaders can help in their respective spheres of influence, by presenting unique formulations about the need for mutual respect for their different religious traditions.

A cardinal principle that naturally motivates Hindus to respect other people is that every person is a divine soul. The Vedic *mahavakya*, or great saying, that captures this sentiment is: “Ayam atma Brahma,” “The soul is God.” Even a terrorist or a criminal is a divine being, though one perhaps needing many lives of further spiritual evolution. There are no people who are evil intrinsically. Their behavior may be evil, destructive, but everybody is divine on the inside. They deserve to be encouraged to come up in consciousness. It is the duty of spiritual people to strive to lift everyone up in consciousness, whether they are for us or against us.

Of course, this doesn’t mean we should gaze naively at everyone through rose-colored glasses, especially those who have been taught to hate others because of their religion, race or nationality. It means not looking at people through the distortion-al lenses of malice, bigotry and bias. Hatred is a reality in this world and needs to be responded to realistically. While being aware of the prejudices of others and the philosophies they have been taught, we can still choose to see their Divinity and hold no prejudice toward them.

Knowledgeable Hindus are accustomed to the existence of many different traditions and viewpoints with Hinduism itself. Thus they are naturally inclined to be tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each religion has a different concept of the Truth and refers to it by a different name. Hindus hold the point of view that all faiths are good and the members of those religions are just fine remaining in the religions they are in. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations.

In expressing tolerance toward other religions, some Hindus use the phrase “Truth is one, paths are many” to assert that all religions are the same. However, if it was making that assertion, would it not say, “Truth is one, paths are one?” The famous phrase simply indicates that the world’s religions all believe in one Truth. But the beliefs and practices are, in fact, quite different. Instead of teaching that “all religions are the same,” teach that “all religions are good.”

Hindu Declaration on Climate Change

Presented for Consideration to the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders,
Parliament of the World’s Religions, Melbourne, Australia, December 8, 2009

*Earth, in which the seas, the rivers and many waters lie,
from which arise foods and fields of grain, abode to all that
breathes and moves, may She confer on us Her finest yield.*

BHUMI SUKTAM, ATHARVA VEDA XII.1.3

The Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus strive to do no harm. We hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life’s cosmic web.

Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. Now centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. We cannot continue to destroy nature without also destroying ourselves. The dire problems besetting our world—war, disease, poverty and hunger—will all be magnified many fold by the predicted impacts of climate change.

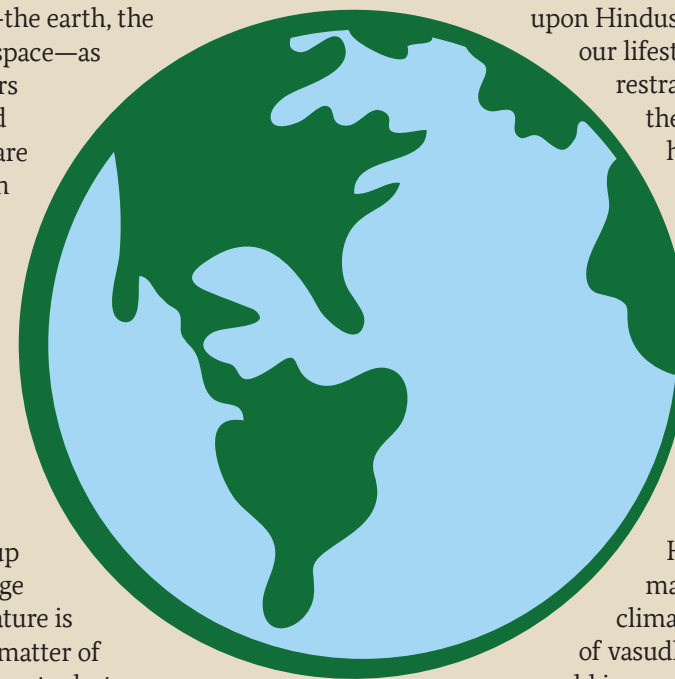
The nations of the world have yet to agree upon a plan to ameliorate man’s contribution to this complex change. This is largely due to powerful forces in some nations which oppose any such attempt, challenging the very concept that unnatural climate change is occurring. Hindus everywhere should work toward an international consensus. Humanity’s very survival depends upon our capacity to make a major transition of consciousness,

equal in significance to earlier transitions from nomadic to agricultural, agricultural to industrial and industrial to technological. We must transit to complementarity in place of competition, convergence in place of conflict, holism in place of hedonism, optimization in place of maximization. We must, in short, move rapidly toward a global consciousness that replaces the present fractured and fragmented consciousness of the human race.

Mahatma Gandhi urged, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” If alive today, he would call upon Hindus to set the example, to change our lifestyle, to simplify our needs and restrain our desires. As one sixth of the human family, Hindus can have a tremendous impact. We can and should take the lead in Earth-friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumption, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism, as well as in evolving technologies that positively address our shared plight.

Hindus recognize that it may be too late to avert drastic climate change. Thus, in the spirit of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, “the whole world is one family,” Hindus encourage the world to be prepared to respond with compassion to such calamitous challenges as population displacement, food and water shortage, catastrophic weather and rampant disease.

Sanatana Dharma envisions the vastness of God’s manifestation and the immense cycles of time in which it is perfectly created, preserved and destroyed, again and again, every dissolution being the preamble to the next creative impulse. Notwithstanding this spiritual reassurance, Hindus still know we must do all that is humanly possible to protect the Earth and her resources for the present as well as future generations.





BASIL SAGE

15 hindu festivals!

JOYOUS OCCASIONS THAT ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF SANATANA DHARMA

HINDUISM IS CELEBRATORY BY NATURE. Hindus miss no opportunity to set mundane matters aside and join with family, friends, neighbors and strangers alike to feast and have fun, to renew the home and the heart and, most importantly, draw nearer to God.

Festivals are perhaps more impressive and varied in Hinduism than in any other religion. The devout Hindu knows these are times of profound mysticism, when God and the Gods touch our world, revitalize our souls, lighten karmas and bless our families.

Yet festivals do even more than this: they are essential to the perpetuation of religion, periodically reigniting the spark of zeal and devotion in the

community. They provide the spiritual public square where Hindus engage with one another, affirming shared values and enjoying

life's intersections.

Before each celebration, vows are taken, scriptures are studied, pilgrimages are trodden and fasts observed in preparation—all individual acts of intimate devotion that bring the devotee closer to the Gods and keep him on the path to his inmost Self. As each festival begins, solitary adoration becomes a collective ritual, with millions of people taking their places in an ad-hoc choreography. Tradition is followed but the result is never the same; every festival is special and unforgettable in its own way.

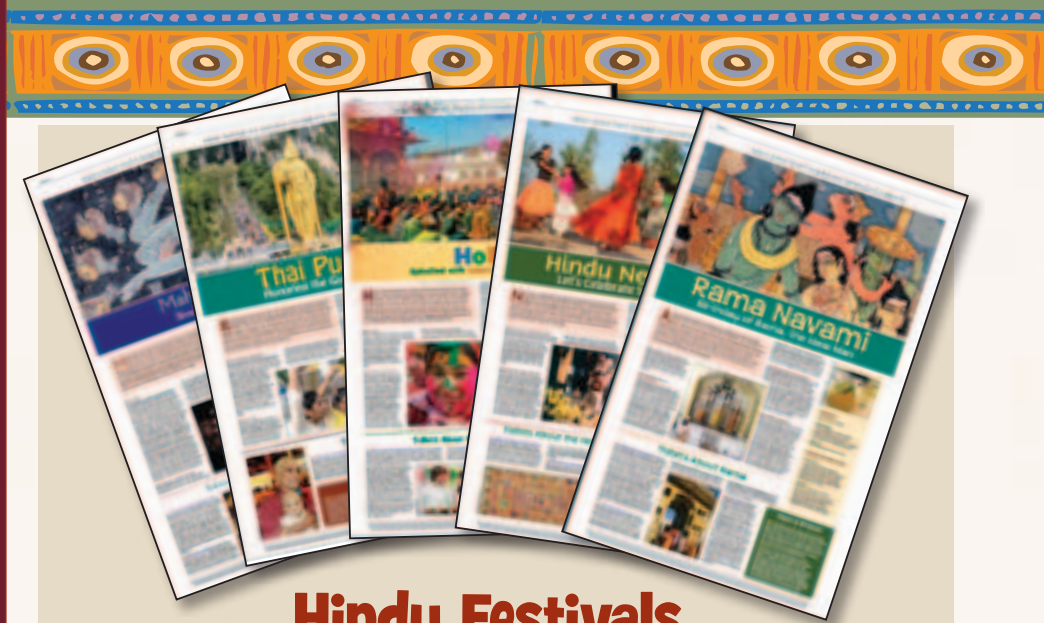
Thus the Hindu is reminded of his faith by the sounds, scents and the wild medley of tastes laid



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Year at a Glance

APR	Hindu New Year
MAY	
JUN	Guru Purnima
JUL	
AUG	Varalakshmi Vrata Krishna Jayanti Ganesha Chaturthi
SEP	Navaratri
OCT	Diwali
NOV	Skanda Sashti
DEC	
JAN	Pancha Ganapati Vaikunta Ekadashi
FEB	Sankranti/Pongal Thai Pusam
MAR	Mahasivaratri Holi Rama Navami



Hindu Festivals For the Media

HINDUISM TODAY is reaching out with accurate and uplifting information about Hinduism

Imprecise information, unflattering photos and an obsession for the bizarre are common when the media features our faith. For most Hindus, there seems little or nothing that can be done about this, except to practice detachment and soulful acceptance. That was the tone at a 2007 Hindu conference in Dallas, Texas, when suddenly the leaders collectively declared "Enough." Determined to complain less and do more, they masterminded the **Hindu Festival Media Initiative**, a strategic project designed by HINDUISM TODAY in collaboration with the Sanatana Dharma Foundation.

There could be no better time to educate the American people about Hindu religion and culture. In 2009, for example, President Obama attended the first Diwali celebration at the White House, a historic moment, complete with Sanskrit chants. Yet, a proper description of the Hindu festival could be found only in the President's inspired speech, for not a single media report rightly explained the festival of lights. Festivals are the obvious topic of choice to introduce Hinduism to the American masses.

The Pager Project: We selected fifteen major festivals as the core of the project and, in collaboration with Soumya Sitaraman of Bangalore, created a series of "pagers," ready-to-print, newspaper-sized posters. They match standard US newspapers in journalistic style and size, making them easy to use, especially for small publishers with limited staff. Each pager highlights a festival in its celebratory, community and family aspects. In the "Fact and Fiction" section and elsewhere, the pagers take the opportunity to introduce Hindu philosophical, cultural and spiritual ideas.

How the Program Works: Newspapers (especially in these days of budgetary cutbacks) welcome input from faith communities if the material is of high editorial quality, with polished text and eye-catching photos, more so if it's free. Motivated Hindus are encouraged to approach their local newspapers' religion or lifestyle editors with the appropriate pager in the weeks before each festival. Editors may elect to use them as is, or draw from the graphics and words and adapt them to their own style. Television and public radio stations can also be approached; the pagers can provide a comprehensive and authentic summary for voice-overs. They are available on the web as teaching resources for families, schools, summer camps, temples, ashrams, bloggers, etc.

How You Can Participate: Talk to your local temple board, the local Hindu association and newspapers in your area. Visit www.hinduismtoday.com/festivals for more information. There you will find all the pagers in PDF with instructions on how to best use them. No matter where you live, these festival summaries will provide your local media with informative, factual information about your faith. By preemptively explaining how Hindus experience and understand Sanatana Dharma, we bridge the we-they cultural gap and participate proactively in bringing more tolerance, acceptance and understanding into the world.



Hindu New Year

Let's Celebrate Springtime!

New Year is celebrated with gaiety and pomp around the world wherever Hindus live, but not on January 1. India's ancient faith salutes the annual genesis at the start of spring, when nature comes to life, in mid-April. The festival has a different name in each regional language; Baisakhi, Vishu, Varusha Pirappu, Ugadi, Badi Deepavali and Bestu Varas are just a few. Homes are lit with oil lamps and decorated with flowers to attract blessings.

Why is New Year celebrated in April?

Like most ancient cultures, Hindus traditionally observe the start of each new year with the arrival of spring, which occurs in mid-April in South Asia. That day coincides with the Sun's entrance into the constellation Mesha (Aries), the first sign in Hindu astrology. Following this astrological calculation, the celebration falls on April 14 in most years.

How is the New Year celebrated?

Hindus don new clothes, exchange sweets, gifts and greetings of goodwill. They clean their homes and decorate the entrance and shrine room with beautiful, colorful patterns called *kolam* or *rangoli*, symbols of auspiciousness. They visit temples, beseeching God and the Gods for blessings for the year ahead. The Goddess Lakshmi and the elephant-headed God Ganesha are especially venerated on this day.



In some communities, elders give money to youth and children as a token of good luck—making the year's first financial act selfless and thus auspicious. Families feast together with great revelry, enjoying elaborate dishes and good company. People gather to listen to interpretations of the star's positions and auguries of things to come, for in this culture the Hindu calendar is closely interwoven with astrology. An elder or a learned astrologer may read the family's fortune for the next 12 months. Predictions are even given on Indian television.

What is the "first seeing" tradition?

In South Indian families, a dazzling arrangement called *kani* is created in the home on New Year's Eve. It is a display of money, jewels and clothing, plants and flowers, fruits and sweets, in the center of which stands a shrine with Hindu Deities. At dawn on New Year's Day, the matriarch wakes up the family members one by one and blindfolds them. She guides them to the shrine and there removes the blindfold, assuring that their first sight of the year is the auspicious, gleaming *kani*. One of the beautiful things to see is a mirror, which serves a dual purpose: it symbolically doubles the abundance and reflects the family with all the signs of wealth around them—an elegant catalyst to manifestation!



Is there just one date for the New Year?

Several other dates are observed by various communities. Particularly in North India, many celebrate New Year on the day

after Diwali, the September–October festival of lights, which signifies hope and new beginnings. Still, nearly everyone joins in the celebrations in mid-April.

Tidbits About the Hindu New Year

What is the nature of the Hindu calendar? The sacred Hindu calendar, called *panchangam*, is an almanac containing astronomical details such as sunrise, moonrise, star-rise, eclipses and lunar phases. It also provides astrological information, including auspicious times for various activities, and inauspicious times as well. The rishis of old imparted the means to calculate this information to help people navigate the ebbs and flows of cosmic energies.

What part do neem leaves play? The bitter leaves and flowers of the neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) are among the central items of New Year celebrations. They are used in food dishes, in decorations and on the *kani* display. Neem is a sacred plant, a botanical marvel with numerous medicinal uses. It is said that its bitterness, spread among the glittering opulence of the New Year's festivities, adds a more realistic perspective on life.



Payasam

This milk-based pudding is immensely popular and so easy to make.

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 25 minutes

Serves: 6

Cooking equipment: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, a ladle, a dish.

Ingredients

- 1 cup vermicelli or sago,
- 4½ cups milk, 1 cup sugar,
- 1/2 tsp cardamom powder,
- 5–6 tbsp chopped cashews and/or almonds,
- 4 tbsp raisins,
- 1 ½ tsp ghee, pinch saffron

Method

1. Heat the milk gently until hot but not boiling.
2. Sauté the cashews, almonds and raisins in half the ghee. Set aside.
3. Sauté the vermicelli or sago in remaining ghee for a few minutes.
4. Add a little of the hot milk to the vermicelli or sago; lower the heat. Drain excess water.
5. Add the saffron to the rest of the milk, and add it gradually to the vermicelli or sago, stirring until the pasta becomes translucent and soft. Cook until milk thickens.
6. Add the sugar and stir until it dissolves. Turn off heat.
7. Garnish with powdered cardamom, fried nuts, raisins and a few strands of saffron.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Reincarnation, a central Hindu belief, gives the assurance that there is no eternal Hell, only chance after chance to improve and redeem oneself as the law of karma brings back to us the fruits of our past actions so that we can learn and evolve. All people are seen as divine, yet shrouded by ignorance. While every soul will ultimately achieve the highest spiritual attainment after many births, still there are young souls and old souls. Young souls, who have lived few lives, are often selfish, instinctive and cruel. Old souls, having experienced many lives, tend to be compassionate, superconscious and gentle.

FICTION: It is often thought that Hindus are forbidden to eat meat. This is not true. Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, but in today's world, not all Hindus are vegetarians.



Guru Purnima

Honoring the Illumined Teachers

Hindu scriptures assert that more valuable than gold, and far more rare, is a guru, a knower of spiritual truths, also called a satguru. A guru is the devotee's best friend, a father and a mother, a trusted confidant and a demanding mentor and guide on the path to God. The guru embodies all that the spiritual seeker aspires to be; in the guru, one sees his own infinite potential. Hindus honor these rare leaders on Guru Purnima, the full moon day in June/July, the Hindu month of Ashada.

What is Guru Purnima?

Guru Purnima is the annual festival which honors spiritual teachers, preceptors and mentors who dispel the darkness of ignorance by bringing forth wisdom and illumination. *Purnima* is the Sanskrit word for full moon.

What are the customs of Guru Purnima?

On this special day all of one's thoughts are focused on the holy preceptor, tuning into his mind, meditating on his teachings and expressing gratitude for his blessings and guidance. In ashrams, monasteries, halls and home shrines, Hindus gather to venerate the guru of their lineage. The day's primary activity is a formal ritual,

called puja, in which his holy feet or a pair of his sandals are honored. At the guru's major centers, the puja is a grand event, preceded



by a festive procession. It is especially auspicious to pilgrimage to the guru's ashram or monastery on this day.

Why is the full moon of Ashada the day of the guru?

In India, this day marks the start of the four-month monsoon season. Traditionally, mendicant saints do not wander during this inclement time, but settle in temporary camps where devotees gather to partake of their wisdom. The first day of learning was dedicated to honoring the preceptor, and it is believed this custom became established as Guru Purnima. The full moon is also known as a propitious time for attaining fulfillment, completeness and spiritual advancement, and for beginning all new endeavors.

Why are the guru's feet the focus of veneration?

According to tradition, God's presence can be most clearly and completely felt in the illumined satguru. To sit at his feet is to be close to God and our own deepest Self. All nerve currents terminate in the feet. Vital energy points relating to every organ of his physical and



inner bodies—astral, mental and soul—are there. Touch the feet and we touch the spiritual master. Venerating the feet of the guru is also an acknowledgement of our deep respect and our knowledge that by following his footsteps we will attain spiritual perfection.

Are gurus worshiped as God?

A few Hindu denominations worship their gurus as the embodiment of God, and may even revere him as an avatar. But most Hindus see their guru as a great illumined soul in whom God's presence is most powerfully apparent.

Tidbits About the Guru

☀ What is the guru's role? It is the guru's task to lead aspirants to God. He sets souls on the spiritual path, corrects those who stray, softens karmas, inspires lifelong practice and, through initiations, awakens the seeker's superconscious knowing. He helps us become aware of our shortcomings and strengths and gives us tools to overcome weaknesses and refine ourselves. The guru, knowledgeable in Hinduism's scriptures, its sacred, practical and philosophical treatises, has the ability to help us unlock their esoteric meaning and gain insight as we study. He guides us in our meditations, helping us navigate the mind and ultimately transcend it.

☀ What is darshan? Darshan, literally "sight," is the mystical meeting of guru and devotee. Hindus travel great distances to experience darshan and receive the blessings of a illumined soul established in his enlightenment. Hindus believe that the spiritual power, called shakti, coming from a great soul accelerates their spiritual evolution, changes patterns in their

life by purifying their subconscious mind, renewing their spirit and commitment to religious life.

☀ Are all gurus renunciate monks? Hindu spiritual teachers may be either unmarried renunciates or householders. Many Hindu institutions are led by luminaries who follow the householder path. Most gurus, however, are celibate monks—swamis, sadhus or acharyas—who have renounced worldly life and received initiation into a monastic order.

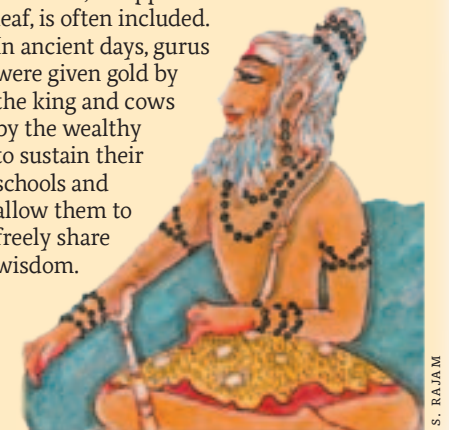
☀ Are gurus centrally organized? Hinduism is actually a multitude of faiths and lineages loosely bound together by common beliefs and practices. There is no central organization. Each guru within his or her own sphere of devotees is the authority on religious matters, his or her wisdom sought and words obeyed. Some are heads of institutions with large followings, while others are reclusive sadhus who rarely appear in public.



Traditional Offerings

When visiting a guru, just as when going to a temple, devotees bring an offering, such as flowers, fruits (a lime is traditional) and, for renunciate gurus, a piece of unstitched cloth. These items are presented in a basket or on a metal tray. A monetary gift, called *dakshina*, wrapped in a betel leaf, is often included.

In ancient days, gurus were given gold by the king and cows by the wealthy to sustain their schools and allow them to freely share wisdom.



Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus consider the mother to be a child's first guru. She and the father are responsible for their offsprings' upbringing, welfare and education. Upon coming of age, youth may turn to a satguru to begin their spiritual training.

FICTION: Some incorrectly criticize Hinduism as a world-negating faith that overemphasizes asceticism and austerity. In fact, while its large contingent of celibate monks pursue the path of renunciation, yoga and deep meditation, the vast majority of Hindus are householders dynamically engaged in family life, career and community service. Tradition affirms the pursuit of four goals: righteousness, wealth, pleasure (including sensual) and liberation.



SOU MYA SITARAMAN

Varalakshmi Vrata

Taking a Vow of Love & Loyalty

Varalakshmi Vrata is one of those rare festivals that are strictly feminine. At this time women celebrate and reaffirm their connection with Goddess Lakshmi, the Divine Mother and provider of abundance and wealth. It is both a celebration and a strict observance,

practiced exclusively by married women. Wives take turns honoring each other as representatives of the Goddess, exchanging sweets, spices, new clothing and money. Women chant the prayers, prepare the offerings and conduct the entire ceremony themselves.

Who is Varalakshmi and what is the vow?

Varalakshmi is the giver of *vara*, meaning boons or wishes. In this form Lakshmi brings prosperity, well-being and fulfilment to the home. The vow, or *vrata*, is each woman's pledge to honor the female principle in the highest manner by observing this elaborate festival.

Where is the festival celebrated and when?

Married women in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra celebrate this festival on the Friday preceding the full moon in the Hindu month of Shravana (August/September).

What are the customs for this day?

Women who wish to wholeheartedly seek the Goddess' protection receive blessings to do so from another who practices the tradition. Girls may participate but do not perform the puja. Homes are thoroughly cleaned, decorated and prepared the day



SOU MYA SITARAMAN

before for the Goddess' arrival. The next morning, a ceremony is performed honoring Ganesha, the Lord of Beginnings. Then, through song, the women invite Varalakshmi into their home shrines. She is represented by a brass vessel (*kalasha*) filled with uncooked rice, betel leaves, betel nuts, coins, turmeric root, dates and other auspicious items. A coconut is seated over the mouth of the pot. The face of the Goddess, an impression usually made in silver (sometimes a coin), is attached to the coconut fibre. The *kalasha* is then decorated with jewelry and draped with cloth and brocade to look like a beautiful Goddess. Several women attach a black-beaded braid with a tasselled ornament at the end.

What rite binds the women to Lakshmi?

Hindu women pray for their family's



SOU MYA SITARAMAN

prosperity and well-being. A *toram* or *sara-du*—a thread stained in turmeric paste with nine knots in a row—is tied to the Goddess. A similar thread is prepared for each lady and placed in front of the Goddess during the puja. After the rituals, the thread-bracelets are distributed and worn on the right wrist as a mark of protection.

Are the food preparations elaborate?

The recipes are unimaginably complex and

time-consuming. Their loving preparation is itself a means of venerating the Goddess and, through Her, all women. To be proper, a feast must have at least a dozen appams, salty pongal, steamed rice cakes and kolakattai, twelve each with coconut filling and sesame seed filling—to name a few items on the menu. Camaraderie abounds and blessings flow in abundance as participants feast on delicacies. Foods prepared for this day are surpassed at no other festival.

Tidbits About Varalakshmi's Festivities

How do women relate to Varalakshmi?

Varalakshmi is the epitome of femininity. She is the giver of pleasure, happiness, love and peace. She embodies strength, resilience and fortitude. She is the teacher, bestowing knowledge. Women pray that they may possess all Her strengths to fulfill their demanding roles in life. A Hindu woman is considered the Lakshmi of her home, the one who brings good fortune. In Hindu marriages, the bride is Lakshmi personified. In the traditional home, Every Hindu wife and mother

is addressed by the title Shrimati, the auspicious one, or Saubhagyavati, the epitome of good fortune.

Are there many forms of Lakshmi?

Though Goddess Lakshmi is one, She is worshiped on different occasions in slightly different aspects, including Gajalakshmi, the royal form of the Goddess, flanked by elephants, representing power; Dhanalakshmi, the supreme giver of wealth; and Danyalakshmi, keeper of grains and abundant food.



SOU MY DAY/WIKIMEDIA

Making Idli

Healthy steamed rice cakes, a staple breakfast food in South India
Preparation time: overnight

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Serves: 6-8

Cooking equipment: A steamer and idli (or muffin) cups.

Ingredients

1 cup unbroken de-husked black gram urad dal, 3 cups rice (brown rice is healthiest), salt to taste

Method

1. Soak rice and lentils in sufficient water for 2 hours.
2. Grind the mix into a fine, fluffy paste, adding water as needed to form a batter thicker than pancake batter. Let ferment overnight.
3. Mix the salt into the batter.
4. Butter the steamer trays.
5. Scoop one ladle of batter into each cup on the tray.
6. Steam for 20 minutes or until the steam smells of cooked dough.
7. Scoop out the idlis. If dough is sticky, steam them a little longer.
8. Enjoy them while hot, with savory chutney and sambal!

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindu women are honored as bringers of good luck and fortune. They are considered the keepers of culture, tradition, values and morals in a Hindu home. They have equal footing with men in education, politics and the arts. A husband and wife are viewed as yoked oxen, each having to pull the cart of family life for it to move forward. Priests only receive serious responsibilities in a temple after getting married, when they are considered to be stable and responsible.

FICTION: Some wrongly believe that dowry is a mandatory practice with religious roots. It is, in fact, a social custom that came into practice when succession laws favored only the male children in the family. A daughter's wedding was an opportunity to give her a share of her parents' wealth, which she would have no legal claim over later. The law has changed today to give equal rights to heirs of either gender, and parents are also changing, albeit gradually.



INDRA SHARMA

KRISHNA JAYANTI

BIRTHDAY OF THE GOD OF DIVINE LOVE

Krishna, the preeminent incarnation of God Vishnu, lived life to the fullest. He had divine wisdom, charisma and power, but He also enjoyed mischief, games and the company of His beloved Radha. He was the protagonist in an epic war, inspiring by speech and example. Above all, He is known for loving every living being, for He is every one of them. It is His extraordinary life that Hindus celebrate in this birthday festival of fasting, devotion, drama and games.



INDRA SHARMA

Who is Krishna?

Born in a royal family, Krishna was the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. He is the noble philosopher, born to relieve this world of all evil. He is the divine child who brings laughter, love and beauty into life. He is the celestial charioteer whose discourse on dharma to the warrior Arjuna is the heart of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He is the all-knowing Deity at whose feet devotees lay their troubles. To chant "Krishna Arpanam" is to offer everything in complete surrender to Him with full faith that He will take care of it. It is said that in a grand, cosmic *leela*, or play, He creates illusions around us to catalyze learning and realization. Killed by an arrow as He slept in a field of grass, He left this Earth at the end of the Dwapara Yuga, and upon His death some 5,000 years ago our present era began.

What is Krishna Jayanti?

Jayanti means birth, and Krishna Jayanti is the Lord's birthday. The festival is also called Krishna Janmashtami, indicating His birth on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of Shravana (August/September).

What do people do on Krishna Jayanti?

Anticipating the birth of the divine child, devotees prepare their home shrines with images of Krishna decorated with flowers (particularly tulsi) and lavishly adorned with jewels. The whole house is made festive with *rangoli* designs, lights and fragrant flowers festooning doorways. The discipline is to fast during the previous day and keep an all-night vigil. Families and communities sing and dance late into the night as bards recall Krishna's youthful antics, His passionate love for Radha and His precious teachings. At midnight, the time He was born, a statue of the infant Krishna is bathed, dressed in new clothes, placed in a cradle and worshiped in an elaborate puja. The fast is then broken, and devotees celebrate and feast for

hours. At dawn, women paint baby footprints on the floor leading to the shrine room, a sign that Krishna has entered their home.

How do devotees relate to Krishna?

Interaction with Krishna is always personal. Depending on the devotee, the love inspired by the Divine energy that is Krishna is like that of a mother for a child, a teen friend for another, a lover for a life partner. To many, Krishna is the ultimate mentor and refuge in challenging, soul-searching times. He reminds us of our dharma, or duty, and explains the philosophical choices we have in life. Ultimately, Krishna shows us the path to God Realization.

TIDBITS ABOUT LORD KRISHNA



In what ways is Krishna portrayed?

Krishna is normally seen as a young cowherd playing a flute, illustrating His days as a carefree youth who whittled reeds into flutes and enchanted the world with music. As an infant, paintings show Him crawling or holding a ball of butter. As a young man, He is the perfect lover. As an adult, He is Arjuna's wise charioteer on the Mahabharata battlefield. Krishna literally means dark. It is said He is so dark that His skin has a bluish sheen.

Who are the women in Krishna's life?

Radha is the lovely young woman Krishna loved. She represents the devotee, loved by Krishna. Rukmini is Krishna's soft, gentle and beautiful wife. Satyabhama, another wife, is a brave, daring warrior. On moonlit nights, Krishna dances with the gopis, lovely maiden cowherds. Krishna's myriad amorous encounters symbolize the infinite capacity of His love, indicating that each of us, no matter how common, can simultaneously be one with the Lord.

What is the handi competition?

Reenacting the story of Krishna and His playmates absconding with earthen pots of buttermilk, called *handi*, young men in Maharashtra form human pyramids to reach a high-hung pot of buttermilk and break it with a blunt object, spilling the liquid on all below. Handis are set up in various parts of cities, and teams travel around in trucks competing, as young men do, to break as many as possible, especially those that promise hefty rewards.



SOUMYA SIVARAMAN

PANCHA KAJJAYA

This sweet, crunchy salad is enjoyed as a snack or an exotic side dish. Preparation time: 30 minutes. Cooking time: 10 minutes. Serves: 6-8.

Ingredients

4 cups thin beaten rice (poha); 4 cups grated coconut—preferably fresh, but frozen will work. If using dry coconut, soak in water for 1 hour and squeeze out. 1 to 2 cups powdered jaggery, 4 tbsp white sesame seeds, 1 tsp cardamom powder, 2 tbsp honey

Method

1. Mix rice with the grated coconut and set aside for 30 minutes.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix.
3. Arrange in a shallow dish and pour about 2 tbsp of honey over it.
4. Decorate with thin slices of ripe banana.

Tip: Use only the very thin, light poha. The thicker variety remains hard in the end product and does not absorb the honey.

FACT & FICTION

FACT: It is widely believed that Krishna was an historical figure, though the date of His birth is disputed. Marine archaeologists have recently found compelling evidence of Dvaraka, the capital of His ancient kingdom. Underwater ruins discovered off the coast of Gujarat match descriptions of the city from the epic Mahabharata.

FICTION: A cursory exploration of Hinduism can make it seem superficial, since much of its popular practice, including its festivals, is grounded in a rich treasury of stories, legends and mythology from the Puranas and the epics. In truth, underpinning this delightful literary lore is a deeply mystical nature, vast and comprehensive philosophies, sophisticated systems of yoga and scriptures of peerless profundity.



Ganesha Chaturthi

Honoring the Lord of Beginnings

During Ganesha Chaturthi, a ten-day festival in August/September, elaborate puja ceremonies are held in Hindu temples around the world honoring Ganesha, the benevolent, elephant-faced Lord of Obstacles. In millions of home shrines, worship is also offered to a

clay image of Ganesha that the family makes or obtains. At the end of ten days, Hindus join in a grand parade, called *visarjana* in Sanskrit, to a river, temple tank, lake or sea-shore, where His image is ceremonially immersed, symbolizing Ganesha's merging into universal consciousness.



Who is Ganesha?

Perennially happy, playful, unperturbed and wise, this rotund Deity removes obstacles to good endeavors and obstructs negative ventures, thus guiding and protecting the lives of devotees. He is the patron of art and science, the God inhabiting all entryways, the gatekeeper who blesses all beginnings. When initiating anything—whether learning, business, weddings, travel, building and more—Hindus seek His grace for success. He is undoubtedly the most endearing, popular and widely worshiped of all the Hindu Deities. Ganesha Chaturthi (also called Vinayaka Chaturthi) falls on the fourth day in the waxing fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada in the sacred Hindu lunar calendar, which translates to a certain day in August-September. It is essentially a birthday celebrating Ganesha's divine appearance.

What do people do on Ganesha Chaturthi?

Devotees often fashion or purchase a Ganesha statue out of unbaked clay. Many sculpt Him out of a special mixture of turmeric, sandalwood paste, cow dung, soil from an anthill and palm sugar. The Deity image




is placed in the home shrine amongst traditional decorations. A rite of worship and prayer, called puja, is conducted daily, invoking the energies of the Deity and inviting Him to reside in the clay image. Mantras are chanted and offerings are made throughout the puja, including incense, lighted lamps, cooked food (*naivedya*), fruits, durva grass, tulasi and pomegranate leaves—and flowers, especially red ones. After ten days, a simple puja is performed before the statue is taken for a formal departure (*visarjana*). Often entire communities, from dozens to tens of thousands of devotees, gather each year for this final day of ceremony. The icons are carried on an


ornate metal tray—larger images are borne on a palanquin by several strong men—to a lake, a river or the sea. There Ganesha is consigned to the water after removing non-degradable paraphernalia.


What foods are offered?

Sumptuous foods are specially prepared for Ganesha, keeping in mind His elephantine nature and prodigious appetite. People offer several varieties of fruits such as mangoes, bananas and sugarcane. Sweets are the elephant-headed Deity's delight, so to express their love families take great pains to make special tasty treats. Each family has its recipes.


Tidbits About Ganesha

 **Where is this festival most popular?** Nowhere is Ganesha Chaturthi observed with more creativity and enthusiasm than in Mumbai, India. The city virtually shuts down as millions of Hindus celebrate.

 **Why is He Ganesha worshiped first?** Lord Brahma declared that any worship conducted without seeking Ganesha's blessings would be fruitless. He is considered a loving, playful, protective Deity whose blessings would grace any endeavor. He is therefore ceremonially invoked before weddings, housewarmings, taking an important exam, starting a new business and other important events.

 **What is His mystical work?** Lord Ganesha is the God Hindus pray to when

changes occur in their lives as they move from old established patterns into new ones. He is always there to steady the minds of devotees and open the proper doors as they evolve and progress.

 **What makes Him distinctive?** Aside from His unique and endearing elephant head, Ganesha carries an elephant goad to prod us along the right path. He holds a noose to lasso foes of dharma and to draw devotees close when they venture off the spiritual path. His mount is a mouse. His big belly is said to contain the fullness of the cosmos. In His hand is a modaka, fruit or other sweet, symbolic of enlightened attainments.



Modaka Sweets

These rich, deep fried, fluffy, sweet dollops are the Mangalorean equivalent of the Tamil *kollukattai*. It is the all-time favorite of Lord Ganesha, who is described as Modaka Hasta, one with the modaka in His hand.

Preparation time: 10 minutes.

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Makes 20 pieces

Cooking equipment: A wok or deep saucepan, a perforated ladle, a lined colander to drain excess oil, a mixing bowl and serving plate.

Ingredients

4 cups thin beaten rice (poha);
1 cup semolina (rava) flour, 1 cup rice flour,
1 cup slightly over-ripe bananas, mashed, 1
cup powdered jaggery (or brown sugar), 1/8
tsp salt
oil to deep fry

Method

1. Mix all the ingredients together except the oil.
2. Add a little water and knead the mixture gently into a thick paste.
3. Heat the oil in the wok.
4. Drop tablespoonfuls of the batter into moderately hot oil and fry till rich brown. Drain and cool, then enjoy!

Fact & Fiction

FACT: There is not just one path to God Realization in Hinduism, but many. Tens of thousands of distinct teaching lineages prescribe varying combinations of prayer, rites and rituals, meditation, chanting and the many yogas to guide followers in their spiritual evolution.

FICTION: Many wrongly believe that Hindus worship cows. Hindus don't worship cows. They respect, honor and adore the cow. By honoring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, Hindus honor all creatures.



Navaratri

Dedicating 9 Nights to the Goddess

Millions of Hindu women consider Navaratri the year's central festival, the one they most deeply connect to. These nine days dedicated to Shakti, the Goddess, provide an opportunity to seek blessings and commune with their own divinity. It is a time for sacred gatherings, austerities, selfless acts and intimate prayers. But Navaratri is not just for the ladies; everyone turns out for the joyous worship, festivities, plays, feasting and dance—all venerating God as the loving Mother Spirit that gives life to everything.



What do Hindus do for Navaratri?

Navaratri starts on the new moon of September/October. On the first day, it is customary to plant seeds in a clay pot which will sprout over the next nine days. In some communities, women prepare a specially decorated *kalasha*, a vessel symbolizing the fertile womb, representing the Goddess. Especially in cities in Tamil Nadu, families create elaborate shelf displays, called *kolu*, of handmade clay dolls. Adding new dolls each year and handing the collection down to the next generation results in some grand displays.

How is Navaratri observed in homes?

Each night, the Goddess "holds court," and special food offerings are presented as prayers eulogizing Her powers are chanted. Guests are invited to showcase their artistic skills, and all enjoy sweets and other treats. Women dress up and visit female friends and relatives, taking a tray of offerings which includes the betel leaf and nut that bear the gravity of a formal contract of friendship and loyalty. Other items on the tray—beauty accessories, fresh turmeric root and coconut—symbolize goodwill and fertility. They fast, pray morning and evening, and give food and cooking pots to the poor. Some families formally honor a prepubescent girl each day, giving her new clothes, treating her to a sumptuous lunch, and pampering her, affirming her femininity and affinity with the Goddess.

How are Shakti's forms worshiped?

In South India the first three days are dedicated to Goddess Durga, the fierce Mother who decimates negative forces. For the next three days, Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity, is revered. The last three days are dedicated to Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and wisdom. In this way, Hindus honor women as the protectors of the family, extol their powers of fertility and endurance, venerate them as the source of good fortune and revere them as repositories of culture and learning. In North India one of the nine aspects of Durga is venerated each day. These nine days are celebrated by communities in East India as Durga

Puja, treating the Goddess as the Daughter who has come to her maternal home for an annual visit.

What is the final day?

Vijaya Dashami, "triumphant tenth day," celebrates Durga's legendary victory over Mahishasura, a powerful being fraught with ignorance and selfishness. On the same day many celebrate Rama's victory over the evil Ravana. The celebration is a reminder to persist in the challenges we face in life. Local traditions vary widely, and this day is known by other names, including Dussehra, Dasara and Dashain.



Tidbits About Navaratri

What special events occur on Maha Navami, the ninth day? Books, musical instruments, equipment and tools are placed before Goddess Sarasvati for blessings, seeking Her gifts of talent, ability and inspiration. This rite, called Ayudha (weapon or tool) Puja, began when the kings of ancient India had their weapons blessed. Today any tool of one's trade may be consecrated: craftsmen's tools, books, offices, vehicles, computers, even iPhones! Devotees reflect on their skills, strengths, goals and needs. A key rite of passage for children ages three to five is performed on this day. Called *vidyarambha*, "beginning of learning," it marks the start of a child's formal education.

Are there group festivities? In the evenings, devotees gather to dance in halls and public squares. The Garba, Gujarat's popular folk dance, is a vigorous dance performed in circles while twirling, jumping, flailing the arms, clapping rhythmically and stepping in sync. In the Dandiya-Ras, sticks are part of the choreography. Dancing is a community expression of joy and togetherness.



SOUNYA SITARAMAN

Sundal

This is a high-protein, low-oil dish made from steamed or boiled whole chickpeas.

Preparation time: Approx. 1 hour

Serves: 6

Equipment: A pressure cooker, a ladle, a wok or saucepan and a dish

Ingredients

1 cup chickpeas, ½ tsp turmeric powder, 3 tbsp to ½ cup grated coconut, 1 tsp black mustard seeds, broken dried red chillies (to taste), ½ tsp asafoetida powder, sliced green chillies (optional), curry leaves, salt

Method

1. Beforehand, soak the chickpeas for 12 hours. Cook with the turmeric powder and salt in a pressure cooker (1:2 ratio of beans to water) until soft but firm, not mushy. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat ghee; add the mustard seeds and let them pop.
3. Add the curry leaves, chillies and asafoetida; roast the mixture slightly.
4. Add the cooked chickpeas. Stir gently over a low flame, taking care not to mash them.
5. Add grated coconut and salt to taste. Mix well.
6. Enjoy!

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus place high value on self improvement through education and learning of all kinds. In bygone days women and men were educated from age seven: students lived as part of their teacher's family. Hindus revere women as the guardians of culture, family, religion, learning and prosperity. Modern Hindu society has the highest number of female spiritual leaders in the world.

FICTION: Many wrongly believe that Hindu women are prohibited from learning, performing rites, ritual and prayer. Hindu women are not oppressed or considered unequal to men, but honored and respected. Hinduism is the only major religion to honor God's feminine power!



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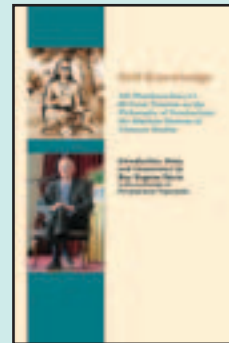
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CHAPTER

4

India as Colony: 1850 to 1947

The British Crown took over
direct control of India from
the East India Company in
1858. Economic exploitation
increased. A determined and
mostly nonviolent freedom
movement emerged and finally
succeeded, resulting in the
formation of modern India
and Muslim Pakistan in 1947.

Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is the fourth chapter in our series on Hindu history intended for use in US primary and secondary schools. Like preceding chapters, it openly discusses topics that are neglected or covered only briefly in current American curricula. We summarize the political history of India between 1850 and 1947, then tell the story of two influential men: Swami Vivekananda, who presented to the Western world a view of Hinduism as a tolerant, sophisticated faith, and Mahatma Gandhi, who taught the world the power of nonviolent political action. Finally, we explore Hindu food, dress, rites of passage and initiations. Overall, the student is provided a glimpse into the beliefs,

traditions, practices and refined culture that enabled Hinduism to survive the onslaught of conquest and colonialism. This lesson was written and designed by the editorial staff of HINDUISM TODAY in collaboration with Dr. Shiva Bajpai, Professor Emeritus of History, California State University, Northridge, Los Angeles.

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Soldiers on parade receive King George V and Queen Mary as they enter Mumbai in 1911 through the "Gateway of India" especially built for their arrival. The last British soldiers left through it in 1948.



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MYERS BROTHERS



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British Rule's Mixed Blessings

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. India became a British colony following the 1857 uprising.
2. Under British rule, India suffered poverty, famine and lack of freedom. These inspired the Indian independence movement.
3. Through mostly non-violent means, India won independence after World War II, but Pakistan was divided off for Muslims.



The Big Idea

After ten centuries of alien occupation and a century of struggle, the Indian people regained their independence.



This column in each of the three sections presents our subject outline for India and Hinduism from 1850 to 1947.

1. Assess the impact of colonization, especially English education, on the people of India.
2. Explain how the uprising against the East India Company led to the establishment of the British Raj.
3. Describe the history of India's movement for independence, including the role of Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns.

If YOU lived then...

You are a Hindu sepoy in the Indian army in 1857. New rifle cartridges have been issued. To use them, you have to bite off the tip, which is smeared with beef fat. You have never eaten or even tasted meat, as killing animals, especially cows, goes against your religious beliefs. If you refuse, you will be arrested—and possibly executed. If you run away, you risk the same fate. **What do you do, and why?**

BUILDING BACKGROUND: Nationalism or patriotism is love and devotion to one's country. Before the 19th century, people felt loyalty to their regional ruler and culture. They were less concerned about the country they shared with others. Starting in the 19th century, people developed political sentiments for their country as a whole and promoted a national identity.

Understanding Colonialism

As we learned in the last lesson, the British East India Company came to dominate India through its clever use of political strategy, **intrigue** and military force. In 1858 India became a colony of the British Empire. Powerful nations, including England, Spain, Portugal, France and Holland, had used their financial and military power to establish colonies in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Many colonies, such as in North America and in Australia, were created by military conquest. The conquerors drove out or killed the native peoples, whom they regarded as subhuman. They then settled the land with immigrants from their own countries. Other colonies, such as India, were first opened through trade and commerce which eventually led to their foreign economic domination and political control. England's colonies included India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaysia, Singapore and hundreds of other territories large and small worldwide. The English defended their conquests by claiming that they were a superior race with a noble mission: to spread Western civilization. This sounds very racist today. But it was then a firm belief of most Englishmen.

While England profited from its colonies, the colonies suffered oppression and disease. In the 19th century, the British did bring notable advances of the Industrial Revolution to India. But a century

of British rule drove a wealthy and vital India into poverty and weakness.

Britain introduced English education in 1835 to strengthen its power. Indians excelled in the new education system, with unintended results. They read, in English, how the American colonies banded together in 1776 to free themselves from Britain and establish a democracy. They learned how the French gained freedom by overthrowing their king in 1789. Indians rightly concluded that their ancient land—Bharat Mata, “Mother India”—had the same right as America and France to be free and independent. But it would take a century to achieve this goal.

The 1857 Revolt

The East India Company dominated India until the 1850s. A huge uprising in 1857 led to the direct and official takeover of India by the British government.

Many Indians were unhappy with the Company. It took over previously independent kingdoms within India. Its economic policies made most people poor. Its British-run police and law courts were inadequate or corrupt. Within their army, the British officers had little respect for their Indian soldiers or *sepoys*, and in some cases promoted their conversion to Christianity.

A relatively simple incident triggered the massive revolt. A new type of greased cartridge was issued for the sepoys' Enfield rifles. Word spread that the grease was beef and pork fat. To load a cartridge, one had to bite off the greased tip. The sepoys refused to use them: the Hindus because they considered the cow sacred; the Muslims because they considered the pig unclean. The sepoys **mutinied**, attacking and killing their British officers.

The revolt spread across North India, as Hindus and Muslims, elites and commoners,

1909: British India and the Princely States



The red areas were under direct British control. The yellow areas, called “Princely States,” had local Indian rulers who answered to the British.

joined forces against the British. Many landlords, left impoverished, joined the rebellion. Within a year, the British ruthlessly crushed the revolt, killing hundreds of thousands (some say millions) of soldiers and civilians.

Stories (some true, some false) of British women and children being killed by the rebels **inflamed** public opinion in England. Charles Dickens, author of *A Christmas Carol* and other famous stories, wrote that if he were commander-in-chief in India he would “strike that Oriental Race ... proceeding, with merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and **raze** it off the face of the Earth.” Although Dickens championed the poor in England and opposed slavery in America, he held a **rabidly** racist view of Indians.

The British were shocked by the uprising, which recalled the American Revolution. To protect their power, investment and income, they tightened their grip on the subcontinent by transferring rule from the East India Company to the British government.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

intrigue

secret planning to harm another

mutiny

a revolt by soldiers or sailors against their officers

inflame

to cause strong emotions

raze

to destroy completely

rabid

extreme or fanatical support of a belief

The new government of India was called the Raj, a Sanskrit word meaning to reign or rule. Its first steps were to ensure that no future rebellion would take place. The ratio of English soldiers in the army was greatly increased. Sepoys of various castes, religions and regions were assigned to separate units to prevent possible **conspiracy**. The population was disarmed. Ownership of guns was allowed by license only. Generally, Indians had no rights and no voice in their own rule.

Tax revenues from agriculture and industry that should have benefitted India instead went to England. Between 1770 and 1857, mismanagement worsened the effects of twelve major **famines** and many minor ones. According to official figures, 28 million Indians starved to death between 1854 and 1901. India's share of world income shrank from 22.6% in 1700 to 3.8% in 1952.

India. The peaceful demand for freedom by nationalist political organizations continued decade after decade, at times turning into violent but unsuccessful uprisings.

The Road to Independence

On April 13, 1919, British General Dyer led an attack upon a peaceful political meeting of unarmed men, women and children at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In ten minutes, 400 people were shot dead and 1,200 seriously injured. Instead of being punished for his crime, Dyer was honored as a hero.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

duty free
being exempt
from import and
other taxes

ruthless
cruel; lacking
pity for other's
suffering

convinced Gandhi that only a mass struggle against foreign rule would save India. From 1920 on, he led a national movement for freedom based on his philosophy of nonviolent resistance called *satyagraha*, “force of truth.” Indian nationalists stopped cooperating with the government, refused to pay taxes and burned English goods in public. Gandhi and his followers were repeatedly beaten and jailed.

World War II began in 1939 as Germany and Japan sought to add countries to their empires by force, just as Britain had done a century earlier. The war put Britain in the awkward position of defending its own freedom and democracy against Germany while continuing to deprive India of hers.

Britain's military force in India was composed of Indian soldiers and sailors commanded by British officers. By the 1940s, the loyalty of these hired servicemen to their foreign masters diminished as the demand for freedom swept over India. A 1946

Crippled by World War II and nearly bankrupt, Britain gave up India and other colonies, including Burma and Ceylon. India's transition to freedom on August 15, 1947, brought with it a terrible tragedy. Pakistan was **partitioned** from India on the basis of religion. A huge relocation followed as 7.5 million Muslims moved to Pakistan from India and an equal number of Hindus and Sikhs fled Pakistan. A million died from hardship, attacks and riots. On January 30, 1948, a Hindu, enraged over the partition, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- ## FOCUS ON WRITING

- ## Timeline: 1857 to 1947 ce

First Indian indentured laborers arrive in South Africa; tens of thousands more eventually go to Africa, Fiji and the Caribbean

Birth of
Mohandas K.
Gandhi who
won India's
independence
by nonviolent
means



1876-1890
Fifty-volume *Sacred Books of the East* is published, English translations of Indian and other Eastern scriptures

Lokmanya B. G. Tilak starts Ganesha and Shivaji festivals in Bombay to mobilize mass Indian nationalism



B. G. Tilak declares,
"Independence
is our birthright"

17 million people, 5% of India's population, die in Spanish flu pandemic; 50 million perish worldwide



Gandhi named Time Magazine "Man of the Year" as his fame grows in the West following the successful Salt March

Three million
Bengalis die in
famine caused by
British negligence

1940

1857 British government suppresses widespread uprising and begins formal imperial rule of India

1863
Birth of Swami
Vivekananda,
India's
first Hindu
missionary
to the West



1876
Queen Victoria
of England is
proclaimed
Empress of India

1885
Indian National Congress is founded to voice Indian concerns to the British government

1893
Swami
Vivekananda
represents
Hinduism at the
Parliament of the
World's Religions
in Chicago

1900
India's population
is 290 million,
18% of the
world's people

1919
General Dyer
orders troops to
fire on an unarmed
political gathering,
killing hundreds;
Gandhi begins
noncooperation
movement

1921 Subhash Chandra Bose advocates armed rebellion. In 1943 he forms the Indian National Army of 40,000 troops which fought against British troops in Burma.

1939 Beginning of World War II, which ultimately results in the death of 60 million people

1947 India gains independence. Pakistan is divided off along religious lines for Muslims

The Challenge of Ideas

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Missionaries and colonists believe that their culture is superior to all other cultures.
2. Swami Vivekananda popularized the Hindu belief that all religions are valid paths to God.
3. Gandhi's satyagraha campaign brought independence to India and inspired nonviolent movements for freedom and civil rights around the world.

The Big Idea

Hindu ideals of nonviolence and religious tolerance have helped shape today's world.

Key Terms

satyagraha, p. I-8
colonized mind, p. I-9



5. Describe the conflict of ideas between prominent Hindus, including Vivekananda and Gandhi, and British missionaries and colonists.
6. Identify the influence of Swami Vivekananda on modern ideas of religious tolerance.
7. Explain how the Hindu principles behind satyagraha have improved the lives of people around the world.

If YOU lived then...

It is May 4, 1963, Birmingham, Alabama, USA. A thousand students from the city's all-black high school join the nonviolent freedom protest led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to **desegregate** the city. Police knock them down using high-powered fire hoses and arrest hundreds. Your 17-year-old daughter is arrested and jailed for three days.

What do you say to her when she returns home?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: Dr. King went to India in 1959 to study Gandhi's methods. He adopted satyagraha, calling it "nonviolent direct action." King said it should so "dramatize an issue that it can no longer be ignored." Gandhi translated *satyagraha* as "truth force" or "soul force." Satyagraha, he taught, forbids inflicting violence on one's opponent.

Understanding the Power of Ideas

In the 19th century, India was fighting the British in a war of ideas. One battle was over religion: Christian missionaries believed it was their sacred duty to convert all Indians. Another was over colonialism: the British were ruling India by military force, supported by the idea that they were a superior race. Many thinkers and activists, key among them Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, challenged these ideas. Today nearly all colonies have been freed. Few countries, if any, would claim a moral right to colonize another. But religious conflict remains a crucial issue. Vivekananda's teaching of equal respect for all religions is more relevant today than ever before.

A Young Monk with a Message of Tolerance

The story of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) starts with a temple priest named Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) who lived near Calcutta. He was a mystic, a person who had visions of God and many profound spiritual experiences. Though not formally educated, he attracted followers from the city's prominent families. One was an 18-year-old college student named Narendranath Dutta.

When they first met, Narendra asked Ramakrishna why he believed in God. Ramakrishna replied, "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much more intense sense." Narendra took

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S ADDRESS TO THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

On September 11, 1893, Swami Vivekananda began his address with the words, "sisters and brothers of America," resulting in a two-minute standing ovation. He continued, "It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

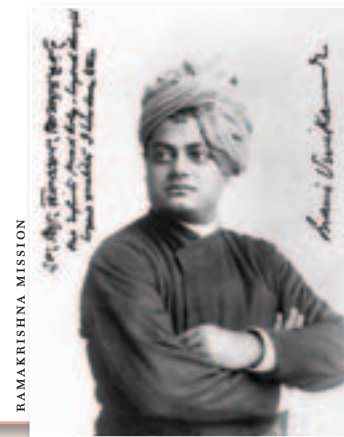
"I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions to be true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.

"I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have

repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: 'As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, O Lord, so the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'

"Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have possessed long this beautiful earth. It has filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for this horrible demon, human society would be far more advanced than it is now.

"But its time has come, and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention will be the death-knell to all persecutions with the sword or the pen, and to all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Ramakrishna as his guru and was trained by him for the next five years.

After Ramakrishna's death, Narendra took vows as a Hindu monk, becoming Swami Vivekananda. He gave up his further education and instead set off on **pilgrimage** across India. He deeply impressed many people in Madras. They raised money door to door to pay for his travel to America for the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions.

At that interfaith congress in Chicago, the cultured and **eloquent** 30-year-old swami was well received. In his opening talk, he declared, "We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions to be true." The popularity of this Hindu message of respect and tolerance alarmed some Christian participants who had hoped the Parliament would prove their religion superior to others.

The *New York Herald* reported at the time, "Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation." Another reporter

wrote, "The **impertinence** of sending half-educated **theological** students to instruct the wise and **erudite** Orientals was never brought home to an English-speaking audience more forcibly."

Vivekananda returned to India a hero. He aroused a new pride among Hindus and kindled in India's youth a nationalist spirit. Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission as a religious and educational institution to address India's social problems. He died on July 4, 1902, at age 39. Freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose aptly called Swami "the maker of modern India."

Vivekananda was not the first Indian religious and social reformer of the 19th century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy sought to counter the criticisms of Hinduism made by the British missionaries. He founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 as a new religion with Christian-style services. Swami Dayananda Saraswati was a Hindu traditionalist. He began the Arya Samaj in

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

desegregate
allow equal access to public places for all races

pilgrimage
to travel to a sacred place for worship

eloquent
pleasant, fluent, convincing in speech

impertinence
lack of respect, rudeness

theological
having to do with the study of religious concepts

erudite
scholarly; having great learning

In 1930 Gandhi led a march to challenge laws that taxed salt and imposed burdens on the poor. His public spectacle of breaking the law by collecting salt at the sea was a turning point for the organized opposition to Britain's tyranny.



NATIONAL GANDHI MUSEUM

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

egalitarian

the principle that all people deserve equal rights and opportunities

callous

lacking mercy

tyranny

cruel and unjust use of power or authority

1875 to revive Vedic society and religion. He believed Hinduism could be purified by a return to the teachings and practices of the *Vedas*. Both the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj encouraged Indians to be **egalitarian** and do more social service for the poor.

Vivekananda, on the other hand, had a powerful impact both on India and the West. In particular, he introduced the Hindu idea that all religions deserve respect as valid paths to God, an idea now firmly established in America. In 2008, polls found that while 76% of Americans identify themselves as Christian, 65% believe that “many paths other than my own can lead to eternal life.” How different from Vivekananda’s time, when most Americans were staunch Christians who believed theirs was the only way to God!

Satyagraha: Fighting without Violence

Mahatma Gandhi was a devout Hindu, a skilled lawyer and a master politician. His

strategy to gain India’s freedom was *satyagraha*, “truth force,” the application of righteous and moral force in politics. Satyagraha is based on Hindu principles, including nonviolence, the ultimate goodness of the soul and a belief in the existence of God everywhere and in everyone. Satyagraha requires a core group of self-sacrificing and disciplined activists. To be successful, it must have widespread publicity, generating national concern and international pressure.

Since Gandhi’s time, satyagraha has been used to win civil rights for blacks in America, improve conditions for California farm workers, end apartheid in South Africa and publicize human rights abuses in Myanmar.

Gandhi used the power of satyagraha to oppose the British salt tax to tighten its stranglehold on India’s economy. The Raj imposed strict controls on salt production and a stiff tax on its sale. People could be arrested for making or selling salt. This **callous** tax on a basic necessity of life especially burdened the poor. To Gandhi, the

salt tax symbolized the **tyranny** of the Raj.

Gandhi’s dramatic revolt, the Salt March, began on March 12, 1930. Tens of thousands of people cheered as he walked 390 kilometers from his Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, to Dandi Beach. After morning prayers on April 6, he collected salt on the seashore and proclaimed, “With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.” Hearing this, people all across India freely collected and sold salt. Tens of thousands were arrested, including 18,000 women. The march was closely covered by the international press, making Gandhi famous in Europe and America.

Six weeks later, hundreds of marchers attempted to take over the Dharasana Saltworks, 300 kilometers north of Bombay. The ensuing clash was reported worldwide by Webb Miller of United Press International: “Police charged [the marchers], swinging their clubs and **belaboring** the raiders on all sides. The volunteers made no resistance. As the police swung hastily with their sticks, the natives simply dropped in their tracks. Less than 100 yards away I could hear the dull impact of clubs against bodies. The watching crowds gasped, or sometimes cheered, as the volunteers crumpled before the police without even raising their arms to ward off the blows.”

Professor Richard Johnson wrote, “It is widely believed that the Salt Campaign turned the tide in India. All the violence was committed by the British and their Indian soldiers. The legitimacy of the Raj was never reestablished for the majority of Indians and an ever increasing number of British subjects.” The independence struggle was now truly a mass movement.

In a similar way, in 1963 Martin Luther King forced the desegregation of Birmingham, Alabama. **Civil rights** activists were arrested by the hundreds as they attempted to peacefully **integrate** the city’s restaurants,

shops and churches. Violent attacks by police on unarmed, nonresisting marchers attracted worldwide attention. The United States was shamed and embarrassed as a result. New laws were soon passed requiring equal rights for all.

The Colonized Mind

The nonviolent strategies of satyagraha helped Indians and black Americans attain freedom after centuries of domination. But decades later, they and their descendants still felt inferior to white people. This condition, called “the colonized mind,” can persist long after physical freedom is won.

Many of India’s colonized people, especially those educated in English schools, came to believe that everything about themselves was inferior to that of the British. Thus they considered English superior to any Indian language, English manners better than Indian manners, a suit and tie better than a kurta shirt and pants, and white skin better than brown skin.

Overcoming, or “decolonizing,” the colonized mind requires a multicultural education, self-examination and rejection of externally created ideas of inferiority. The colonized mind is the most lasting negative impact of colonialism.

Section 2 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. **Describe:** What did British missionaries and colonists believe about their culture compared to Indian culture?
2. **Interpret:** How did American journalists react to Swami Vivekananda’s speech at the 1893 Chicago Parliament?
3. **Identify:** Where has Gandhi’s strategy of satyagraha been used outside of India?
4. **Explain:** How did nonviolent protests “turn the tide” for Indian freedom and the American civil rights movement?

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. What Hindu ideals were promoted by Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi? How have they influenced today’s world?

THE IMPACT TODAY

In accepting the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, President Obama said, “As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King’s life work, I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence. I know there’s nothing weak, nothing passive, nothing **naïve** in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.”

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

belabor

to beat severely

civil rights

political and social freedom and equality

integrate

to end the separation of people by race

naïve

innocent; lacking experience

Eating: Indian Style

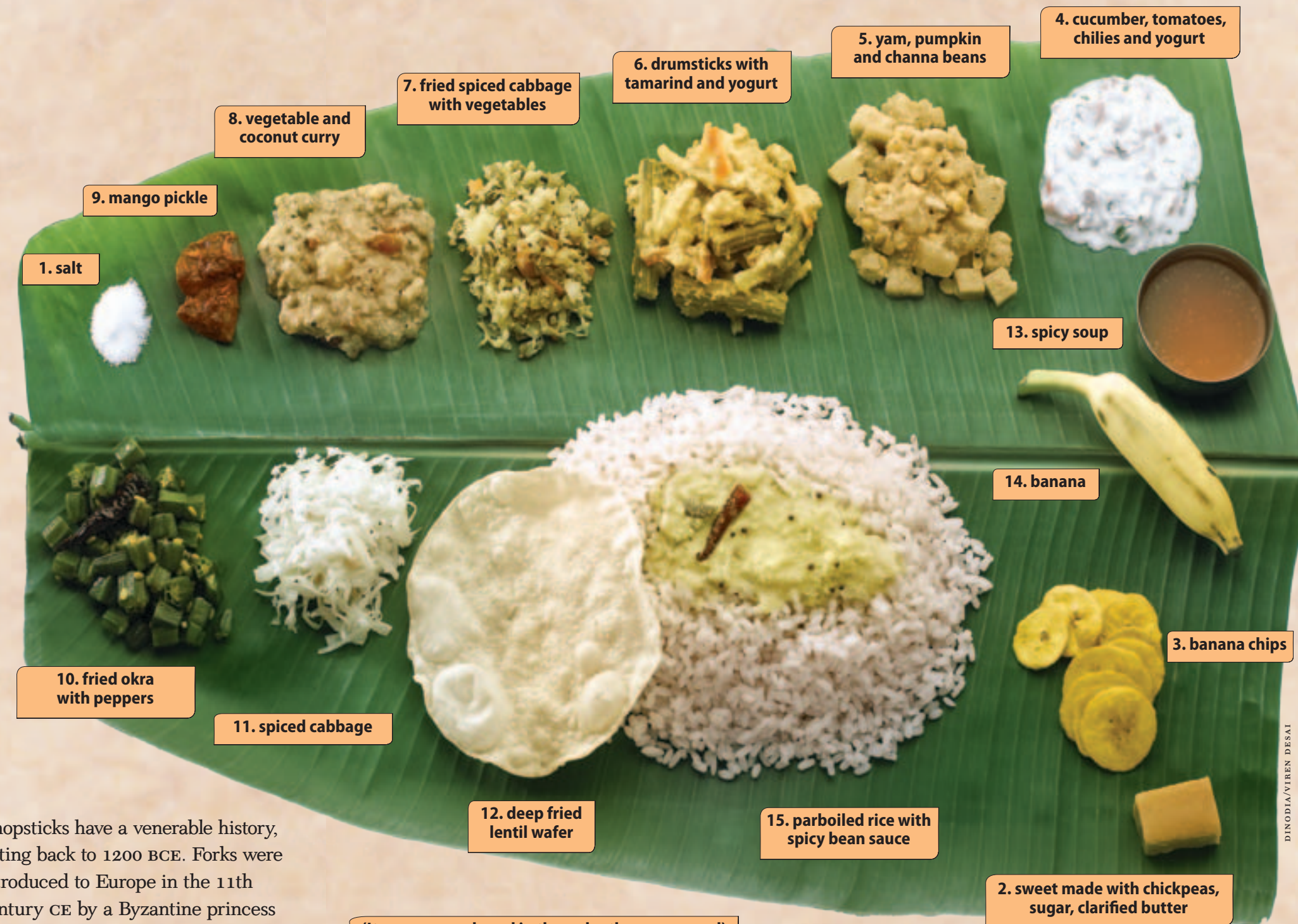
The vegetarian meal at the right may look like a feast, but skilled *ammās* (mothers) prepare some variation of it every day for their families. This traditional South Indian spread is centered around rice. North Indians enjoy wheat-based flatbreads in place of or along with their rice, but the other dishes are similar. Lots of spices are used, including coriander, fenugreek, cumin, cayenne, cardamom, ginger, cloves, chili pepper, black pepper and cinnamon. Depending on the region, spicing may be mild to very hot.

The meal is served in several courses on a banana leaf freshly cut and washed or, more commonly today, on a round metal plate. After washing your hands, you proceed to eat with the fingers of your right hand by taking a small amount of one or two of the vegetable items, mixing them with some rice and popping them in your mouth. Seconds are automatic. In fact, you can only get the host to stop serving more food by covering the leaf with your hands. Water or a cool beverage, such as lassi (a salted or fruit-juice-sweetened yogurt drink), may be served at the end. When finished, you fold your leaf in half, top to bottom. In the villages, the leaves, complete with leftovers, are fed to appreciative cows. Nothing goes to waste, and no plates to wash! After the meal, water is brought for cleaning your hands.

Fingers, Forks and Chopsticks

There are three methods of eating in the world: with forks, with fingers and with chopsticks. Forks predominate in Europe, Australia and North America. Chopsticks are used in East Asia. Fingers are the most widespread eating implement, prevailing in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Middle East and much of Africa. Globally, fork-feeders are outnumbered more than two to one.

Chopsticks have a venerable history, dating back to 1200 BCE. Forks were introduced to Europe in the 11th century CE by a Byzantine princess who married an Italian. She outraged the Italians by refusing to eat with her hands. A Catholic priest pointed out that “God in his wisdom has provided man with natural forks—his fingers.” The rest of Europe was slow to adopt forks. Many royalty, including Queen Elizabeth I and Louis XIV, used their fingers.



(Items are numbered in the order they are served)

Understanding Other Customs

- 1. Compare:** After reading about a traditional South Indian lunch and looking at the images above, compare and contrast it with lunch in your own culture. How are your food and customs similar? How are they different?
- 2. Evaluate:** How do you usually eat food: with fingers, chopsticks or forks? List some advantages and disadvantages of these different ways of eating.

Rites of Passage And Initiations

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

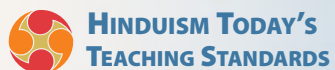
1. The power of Hindu philosophy and cultural tradition helped Hinduism survive centuries of foreign rule.
2. *Samskaras* are rites of passage marking important changes in one's life.
3. *Diksha* or initiation brings a person into a deeper level of religious study and practice.

The Big Idea

Samskaras and *diksha* are key traditions in the lives of all Hindus.

Key Terms

samskara, p. 12
disksha, p. 13
 Agni, p. 13
 mantra, p. 14



8. Describe the important rites of passage for Hindus, including the *samskaras* of childhood, (especially for education) puberty and marriage and death.
9. Explain the importance of initiation for the religious practices of mantra recitation (*japa*) and monasticism.

If YOU lived now...

You are a Hindu American woman who just graduated from the university. Your parents' marriage was arranged, but you swore you would find your own husband. Despite your objections, your parents have secretly found you the "perfect husband." You meet him, and, surprise, he does seem ideal—except that your parents found him instead of you!

What do you tell your parents?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: In precolonial India, a bride brought wealth to her marriage, called *stree dhana* or "woman's wealth." Usually jewelry, this remained her personal property, to be passed on to her daughters. Dowry is a different custom in which the bride's family gives money to the groom. Demand for dowry became common among the upper castes in British times because of changes in land and inheritance laws.

The Sustaining Power of Hindu Tradition

Hinduism survived the centuries of Muslim and British rule on the strength of its philosophy and traditions. We have examined a number of these already, including scriptures, festivals, pilgrimages, temples, puja worship, art, music and dance. Festivals, in particular, are central to the religious, social and cultural life of a Hindu.

In this section, we study two more traditions important to Hindu life: rites of passage and initiation. Rites of passage are the social and religious ceremonies marking important stages in a person's life. These include naming a child, the attainment of puberty, marriage and funeral rites. In Hinduism, these rites are called *samskaras*, which means "to make perfect." Initiations, or *dikshas*, are given by a priest, teacher or guru to bring a person into a new level of education, religious practice and spiritual awareness.

The Rites of Childhood

The *samskaras* of childhood begin before birth with home rituals to ensure the well-being of the mother and her unborn child. The name-giving ceremony is usually held at home on the eleventh day after birth. A pleasant sounding name with a religious or moral meaning is chosen and the father whispers it in the baby's right ear.

Solid food is given to the baby by its father six months after birth in the first-feeding ritual. Head-shaving, symbolizing purity, is performed for both boys and girls at a temple, usually at the end of the first year. At age four, a ceremony marking the beginning of education is done in which children write their first letter in a tray of rice. Ear-piercing, for health and wealth, is performed for girls and boys between the first and eighth year. Girls are **adorned** with gold earrings, bangles and anklets; boys receive earrings and a gold chain.

The *upanayana*, or sacred thread ceremony, is the final ceremony of childhood. It marks the formal beginning of student life. Students begin religious instruction and secular education appropriate to their intended occupation. In artisan communities, a similar ceremony is held for boys to formally accept them into their family craft tradition.

The Coming of Age Ceremony

The community celebrates a girl's entrance into puberty with the *ritu kala* *samskara*, a

home ceremony conducted by the family and close relatives. In the Tamil tradition of South India, for example, the girl bathes and then dresses in her first sari. The family invokes Goddess Lakshmi to bless the young woman with happiness and wealth. She is given many gifts, the first of which is always made of gold. Even today, this *samskara* is a major event for Hindu girls. It is a joyous time of gift-giving, yet serious as well. A vow of **chastity** until marriage may be taken at the same time.

The Rites of Marriage

Hindu weddings are conducted before a sacred fire. This practice dates back thousands of years to Vedic times. Agni, the God of Fire, is called to serve as divine witness to the marriage vows. Weddings are held in special halls. A Hindu wedding can be an elaborate affair spread out over several days attended by many hundreds of guests.

The wedding ceremony is performed by a priest, who invokes Agni by building a small fire in an open brick altar on the ground.

THE IMPACT TODAY

In recent times demands for a costly dowry have led to violence and even murder of women in India

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

adorn
to add beauty; decorate

chastity
sexual abstinence

HONORING LIFE'S IMPORTANT MOMENTS



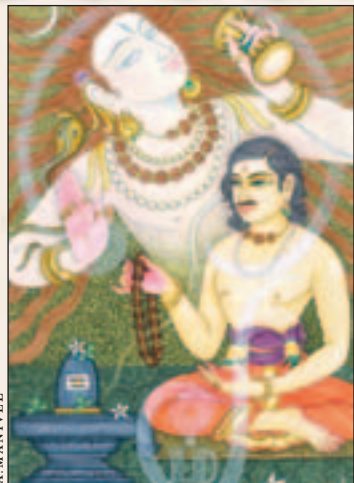
Below a funeral takes place at the cremation ghats along the Ganga River in the holy city of Varanasi.



At left, a brother and sister both have the *samskaras* of head shaving and ear piercing (yes, it hurts) at a South Indian temple; at right a couple in Maharashtra State take seven steps around the sacred fire to complete their marriage ceremony



(above) Wrapping a silk sari in *nivi* style: 1) the plain end is held at the right waist and the rest is passed around the back; 2) seven to twelve pleats are made; 3) the remaining material is passed around the back; 4) the decorative end is draped up and over the left shoulder. (below left) A Saivite does *japa* while visualizing Lord Siva; (below right) boys receive the sacred thread during the *upanayana* *samskara*.



The elaborate rituals normally take hours. Close relatives are brought forward to participate and bless the couple. The groom puts *sindur*, red coloring, on the part in his bride's hair, indicating her new status as a married woman.

The final moment comes when the bride and groom take seven steps together around the fire to symbolize the journey of life they will take together. The first step is for strength, the second for health, the third for wealth, the fourth for happiness, the fifth for children, the sixth for a long marriage and the seventh for loyalty and everlasting friendship. The bride and groom usually go to a temple for blessings after the wedding.

Death and Cremation

When a person is close to death, relatives gather around. They sit for hours with him or her, singing religious songs, reading scripture and chant prayers to create a spiritual environment and ease the loved-one's departure.

After death, the body is bathed and wrapped in white cloth, then taken to the cremation grounds and placed on a wood **pyre** which is lit by the eldest son. The funeral ceremony also requires Agni, God of Fire. He is called upon to consume the body. Cremation swiftly releases the soul from this incarnation and frees it for the next. The following day, the family collects the ashes, to be scattered later in a sacred river or other chosen place.

Home rituals honor the departed soul on the 10th and 13th days after death and yearly thereafter during the two-week period dedicated to honoring one's ancestors each fall. These rites help console loved ones and invite the soul to reincarnate back into the family in the future.

Religious Initiations

A mantra is a sacred word or phrase, usually in Sanskrit. Mantra *diksha* is the most common Hindu initiation. It authorizes the repetition of a mantra as a daily spiritual practice. "Aum Namō Narayanaya" is a mantra chanted in the Vaishnavite tradition. It means "Homage to Lord Vishnu." "Aum Namah

HINDU MONASTIC VOWS

Sannyas diksha is the initiation that makes one a swami or *sannyasin*. A female swami is called a *swamini*. These **monastics** are spiritual leaders and examples for Hindus. This initiation is conducted by a guru after years of training and qualification.



Typically the rites include the shaving of the head, discarding all possessions and thereafter dressing in simple orange robes. In order to be closer to God, the initiate lets go of all worldly things: family life, career, worldly desires and personal ambition. The monastic takes lifetime vows proclaiming his spiritual goal of God Realization. Now born anew, he receives a new name. In some traditions, the initiate symbolically conducts his own funeral ceremony before the sacred fire. This symbolizes the death of his past and personal ego. Many Hindu monks live in spiritual communities called ashrams. Others wander alone throughout India, begging for their food and spending no more than three days in one place. There are dozens of monastic orders in India, some with hundreds of thousands of monks.

Young men, some born outside India are initiated as swamis of the BAPS Swaminarayan Fellowship, November 4, 2005, in New Delhi

Sivaya" is of the Saivite tradition. At the high point of the sacred thread ceremony, students are initiated in a mantra prayer to the Sun God requesting Him to guide their thinking.

Japa is a form of meditation in which God is visualized while chanting a mantra, silently or aloud, 108 times. The repetitions are counted on a strand of sacred beads called a *mala*. Mantra initiation gives power to *japa*. One teacher explained, "Chanting a mantra without initiation is like writing a check without money in the bank."

Mantra *diksha* may be given as early as age six or later in life when a guru is chosen. After initiation, the devotee is obligated to perform *japa* each day as an important part of spiritual practice, called *sadhana*.

Vishesha diksha is initiation into personal daily worship called *puja*. It requires learning the rites, including chanting the prayers in Sanskrit, knowing the meaning of each part of the ritual and vowing to perform it each day in one's home shrine. This is a private worship, different from the public *puja* performed by priests in temples.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The uprising of 1857 brought India under formal British imperial rule. Exploitation of the country continued. Mahatma Gandhi's efforts, the threat of revolt and changes in world affairs forced the British to free India in 1947. Before leaving, the British divided Pakistan from India along religious lines. The nation was left impoverished, though a new middle class had come into existence. Traditional religious beliefs and social practices were little changed by colonial rule.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

pyre

a pile of wood for burning a dead body

monastic

a monk or nun under religious vows

Section 3 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. **Define:** What is a rite of passage?
2. **Analyze:** Why do Hindus cremate their dead?
3. **Explain:** Why does an initiate to a monastic order perform his or her own funeral ceremony?
4. **Identify:** What Hindu ceremony must be performed before one can effectively practice *japa*?

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. **Apply:** How do you think these ceremonies helped Hinduism survive centuries of foreign rule?

Standards Assessment

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION AND CIRCLE THE LETTER OF THE BEST RESPONSE

- Countries justified colonies because they believed:
 - Their people were superior to the natives
 - They could offer a better civilization
 - The natives were subhuman
 - All of the above
- What sparked the 1857 uprising?
 - Corruption in the British courts and police
 - Attempts to convert the sepoys to Islam
 - Commanding the sepoys to use cartridges lubricated with beef and pork fat
 - All of the above
- From 1854 to 1901, how many Indians died in famines?
 - 6 million
 - 12 million
 - 28 million
 - 47 million
- What happened to General Dyer?
 - He was court-martialed and put in jail
 - He was praised as a hero by the British
 - He committed suicide
 - He was quietly discharged from the army
- Why did the Muslims want a separate country?
 - They felt they could be more prosperous
 - They did not want to be a minority in India
 - The British insisted they move out of India
 - World opinion favored the partition
- What idea did Swami Vivekananda bring to the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893?
 - Only Hindus go to heaven
 - Hindu religion is the world's only true faith
 - Hindus respect all religions
 - Hindus are seeking the respect of other faiths
- How did Martin Luther King define satyagraha?
 - "Truth force"
 - "Passive resistance"
 - "Civil disobedience"
 - "Nonviolent direct action"
- What was the main result of the Salt Satyagraha?
 - The independence struggle became a mass movement
 - The British police were punished
 - The Raj apologized for the brutality
 - All of the above
- The term "colonized mind" refers to:
 - A colonized people's sense of inferiority
 - A psychological assessment of intelligence
 - The advantages gained through English education
 - The thinking of British Raj officials
- To refuse more food during an Indian meal you should:
 - Politely tell your host you have had enough
 - Shake your head when approached with seconds
 - Cover the banana leaf with both hands
 - Quietly leave the dining area
- A rite of passage is:
 - A shortcut between two Indian villages
 - A type of temple ritual held annually
 - A ceremony that marks an important stage of life
 - Arranging a marriage for a child
- Mantra *diksha* is:
 - A ceremony performed during a funeral
 - An initiation to chant a particular mantra daily
 - A type of mantra for Vaishnavites
 - The daily performance of puja at home
- At the *ritu kala* ceremony, a girl is given:
 - A bath
 - Her first sari
 - Gold jewelry
 - All of the above
- At the initiation into *sannyas*, the monk
 - Is given simple, orange robes
 - Shaves his head and takes a new name
 - Gives up all possessions
 - All of the above

Internet Resources: Go to <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/education/> for a PDF version of this chapter, as well as Chapters One, Two and Three with clickable links to resources. Also at the same URL are additional

teaching resources and letters of endorsement from academics and community leaders. To order additional copies of this Educational Insight, go to <http://www.minimela.com/booklets/>.

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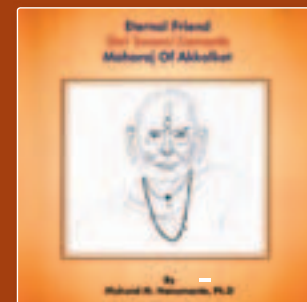
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Diwali

Celebrating the Triumph of Goodness

If you rolled a bit of Christmas, New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July all into one, then catered the affair with mountains of sweets and savory snacks, you would have a taste of what it means to celebrate Diwali, India's best-known festival. It is a day of Hindu solidarity, when

all Hindus gather in love and trust. It is observed by lighting rows of oil lamps and exchanging greeting cards, clothing and other gifts. Family bonds are strengthened and forgiveness sought. For many, Diwali marks the beginning of the new year. Joyous festivities and parties abound.

What occurs on Diwali?

Diwali (or Deepavali, "row of lights") is celebrated by Hindus worldwide to commemorate the triumph of good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, hope over despair. Oil-wick lamps are lit in every household, along with colorful strings of electric lights, causing the home, village and community to sparkle with dancing flames. The festival falls on the day before the new moon in the month of Ashwin (October/November). Communities spare nothing in celebration. Lavish spreads of sweets and treats reflect unfettered partying. Diwali lehyam—a potent concoction made with ginger, pepper, ghee and more—is provided to help gourmands digest the sumptuous feast. Families reach out to each other with gifts of sweets, dried fruit and crunchy, salty treats. Everyone wears colorful new clothing and many even



new jewelry. Girls and women decorate their hands with henna designs.

What does lamp-lighting signify?

In Hindu culture, light is a powerful metaphor for knowledge and consciousness. It is a reminder of the preciousness of education, self-inquiry and improvement, which bring harmony to the individual, the community and between communities. By honoring light, we affirm the fact that from knowing arises respect for and acceptance of others. Lighting lamps reminds Hindus to keep on the right path, to dispel darkness from their hearts and minds, and to embrace knowledge and goodness.

What legends are associated with Diwali?

In the sacred text *Ramayana*, Diwali marks the return of Rama to his



kingdom after defeating Ravana, the demon king who ruled Sri Lanka and kidnapped Rama's pious wife, Sita. It also celebrates Krishna's victory over Narakasura, the demon of ignorance. Rama and Krishna are earthly incarnations, or avatars, of Vishnu.

Does ritual bathing play a part?

Diwali marks the conquest of negative forces. To wipe away all traces of life's struggle, the negative and draining energies of strife, Hindus invoke the waters of India's holiest rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati,

Narmada, Indus and Kaveri—into water collected in urns in preparation for an ablution after an oil massage. The special bath cleanses the physical and auric energies of the individual. Fragrant powders of dried lentils, roots, aromatic seeds, leaves and flowers are used to remove the oil. Families then don fine new clothes, beautiful patterns are drawn on the ground, and lamps are lit until entire streets glow. Even the White House in Washington, D.C., is illumined by the gentle glow of oil lamps during its annual Diwali observances.

Tidbits About Diwali

What else is done for Diwali? *Melas*, or fairs, are held in all Indian towns and villages. In the countryside, the *mela* includes a festive marketplace where farmers bring their produce to sell and clothing vendors have a heyday.

What are the giant effigies that are burned by big crowds? Huge effigies of Ravana, with ten heads, are built of straw and filled with firecrackers. They are burned as a joyous, symbolic cleansing from evil, and lights are lit in every home, just as residents of Ayodhya did to welcome home their victorious king, Rama.

Are there customs for the day after Diwali? The following day, families offer special prayers to Lakshmi for a prosperous year. This ritual worship is also directed to Kubera,

the celestial being who distributes wealth to mortals. As Hindus pray for comfort and the family's material wealth, it is believed that things should not be given away or donated on this one day of the year.



Indian Carrot Sweet

Carrot Halwa

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 60 minutes

Serves: 6–8

Equipment: A small wok or round-bottomed pan, a ladle and a serving dish.

Ingredients

4 cups/1 kg grated carrots, 1 cup sugar, 2½ cups milk, 1½ ladles ghee, a few cashews and raisins, 2 cardamom pods

Method

1. Wash, peel and grate the carrots.
2. Fry the cashews, raisins and cardamom in ghee and set aside.
3. Heat a ladle of ghee in the pan. Add the grated carrots and sauté.
4. Add enough milk to soak the carrots and cook on low heat, stirring occasionally, until carrots are soft. Keep adding milk, a ladle at a time, and cook until the milk thickens, then stir in the sugar.
5. Cook over low heat until everything blends together into a firm mass that separates from the sides of the pan.
6. Garnish with the fried cashews, cardamom and raisins. Top with a little ghee and pistachio slivers for extra flavor.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Believing that the Divine resides in all things, Hindus practice non-injury and hold a deep respect, bordering on reverence, for all living beings. This embracing attitude is reflected in India's history of welcoming refugees from all cultures and faiths. By following dharma, Hindus eschew violence and terror. Secure in their faith, they interact harmoniously with their neighbors, regardless of religious affiliation.

FICTION: Many people wrongly believe that Hindus, being proud of their religion, may disdain other cultures. In fact, Hindus fully accept the spiritual efficacy of other paths and never proselytize.



Skanda Sashti

Approaching the Lord of Illumination

Skanda Sashti is a six-day South Indian festival to Skanda, the Lord of Religious Striving, also known as Murugan or Karttikeya. It begins on the day after the new moon in the month of Karttika (October/November) with chariot processions and pujas invoking His protec-

tion and grace. The festival honors Skanda's receiving His lance, or *vel*, of spiritual illumination, and culminates in a victory celebration of spiritual light over darkness on the final day. Penance, austerity, fasting and devout worship are especially fruitful during this sacred time.

Who is Skanda?

Skanda is a God of many attributes, often depicted as six-faced and twelve-armed. Saivite Hindus hail this supreme warrior, the commander-in-chief of the great army of devas, or beings of light, a fearless defender of righteousness. They honor Him as the mystic healer of ailments and master of yoga, guiding those who persevere on enlightenment's path. Legends say He was the first to renounce the world and step onto the path of kundalini yoga. God Siva bestowed upon His son Skanda dominion over the chakras of willpower, direct cognition, and the purest, child-like divine love. Murugan is the tutelary Deity of the Tamil community.

How is Skanda Sashti celebrated?

It is considered meritorious to undertake a six-day fast, known as the Skanda Sashti Vrata, or vow, in empathy for Skanda's titanic struggle. Many abstain from all foods, while some permit themselves fruits and simple,

unsalted foods. Following immediately after Diwali, the fast is an ideal antidote to that festival's feasting, revelry and overindulging. On the day the fast is broken, families enjoy

a sweet pudding called *payasam* along with fried delicacies. A six-part prayer for protection, called the Skanda Sashti Kavacham, is chanted. Six is a number associated with



HINDUISM TODAY



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this God. Another discipline is to stand in a river, facing upstream, draw a six-pointed star and write "Saravanabhava," His supreme mantra, on the water before doing ablutions. Special decorations adorn home shrines, featuring images of the peacock and the fighting rooster. Devotees pilgrimage to Murugan's temples, especially the temple in Lanham, Maryland, and the seaside sanctuary at Tiruchendur in South India.

What is the legend of Skanda Sashti?

It is said that eons ago, Skanda fought a powerful asura, or demon, named Surapadman, who embodied the forces of selfishness,

ignorance, greed and chaos. Skanda defeated and mastered those lower forces, which He uses, to this day, to the greater good. The subdued demon became his faithful servant, the proud and beautiful peacock on which Skanda rides.

What happens on the sixth day?

In Murugan temples, the Deity is worshiped with oblations of special unguents, milk and other offerings. Crowds gather to watch a dramatic play depicting the conquest of Surapadman. Millions flock to see this drama performed on the beaches of Tiruchendur, where the legendary battle occurred.

Tidbits About Skanda and His Festival

☀ What else occurs on these holy days?

This festival is associated with a unique tradition of giving, *dana*. A young, unmarried male student, *brahmachari*, is invited to the home, served a sumptuous meal with special sweets and honored with gifts of new clothing (usually a traditional unstitched cotton veshti), betel leaf, betel nut and fruits. This boy represents the youthful Murugan, and service to one is service to both.

☀ Why does Skanda bear weapons?

Hindu iconography is rife with fighting implements. Skanda, general of the heavenly army, wields weapons which symbolize His manifold powers. These battle arms represent forces He uses in the subtle realms of the mind, piercing the veils of ignorance, rescuing those in distress

and defending righteousness. He is called the Great Protector.

☀ What does His lance signify?

The lance, or *vel*, embodies discrimination and spiritual insight. It stands for release from ignorance into knowledge, from sinfulness into purity through spiritual austerities.



SOU MYA SITARAMAN

Kesari

This quick and easy sweet semolina-based dish gets its name from *kesar*, or saffron, which gives it a bright orange hue.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Serves: 4

Cooking equipment: a wok, a large spoon and a plate.

Ingredients

1 cup semolina, 2½ cups hot water, 5 tbsp ghee, ½ to 1½ cups sugar, ½ tsp cardamom powder (or fresh ground), a pinch of saffron or kesari powder, 2 tbsp raisins, 2 tbsp cashews

Preparation

1. Heat the water and add the saffron, cardamom and sugar to steep.
2. Heat 2 tbsp of ghee, fry cashews and raisins, drain and set aside.
3. Mix semolina with remaining ghee. Cook, stirring until light brown. Remove from heat.
4. Slowly add the semolina to the hot water, mixing continuously to prevent lumps.
5. Return to very low heat and cook for five minutes, still stirring until the whole mass comes together like a ball and does not stick to the spoon.
6. Transfer to a serving dish.
7. Garnish with fried raisins, cashew nuts and a sprinkle of saffron.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: In ancient days Hindu culture spread peacefully throughout Southeast Asia and west towards Greece and Rome via political ambassadors, traders, saints and travelers. Many communities and individuals beyond India's shores adopted the Hindu way of life by choice.

FICTION: Hindus are sometimes disparaged as "idol worshipers" by those seeking to belittle their faith. In fact, Hindus do not worship a stone or metal idol as God. They worship God through the image, invoking God's presence into the image from the higher, unseen worlds, so as to commune with the Divine for blessings and upliftment. Image worship may be likened to using a telephone to converse across long distances with someone: one is not talking to the telephone.



Pancha Ganapati

The Family Festival of Giving

Think of this as the Hindu Christmas, a modern winter holiday full of family-centered happenings, but with five days of gifts for the kids, not one. From December 21 to 25 Hindus worship Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed Lord

of culture and new beginnings. Family members work to mend past mistakes and bring His blessings of joy and harmony into five realms of their life, a wider circle each day: family, friends, associates, culture and religion.

What is the nature of the festival?

Pancha Ganapati includes outings, picnics, feasts and exchange of cards and gifts with relatives, friends and business associates. A shrine is created in the main living room of the home and decorated in the spirit of this festive occasion. At the center is placed a large wooden or bronze statue of Lord Panchamukha ("five-faced") Ganapati, a form of Ganesha. Any large picture or statue of Ganesha will also do. Each morning the children decorate and dress Him in the color of that day, representing one of His five rays of energy, or *shaktis*.

What happens on each of the five days?

Each day a tray of sweets, fruits and incense is prepared and offered to Lord Ganapati, ideally by the children. Chants and songs are sung in His praise. After the worship, diverse

sweets are shared by one and all. Each day colorfully wrapped gifts are given to the children, who place them before Pancha

Ganapati to open on the fifth day. The adults receive gifts, too! On each day one of the five faces of Pancha Ganapati is worshiped.



December 21, yellow: The family discipline for this day is to create a vibration of love and harmony among all members. Rising early, they decorate the shrine, then perform a grand puja invoking Ganesha's blessings. Sitting together, they make amends for past misdeeds, insults, mental pain and injuries caused and suffered. They conclude by extolling one another's best qualities.

December 22, blue: Day two is devoted to creating or restoring a vibration of love and harmony among neighbors, relatives and close friends. This is done by presenting heartfelt gifts and offering apologies to clear up any ill-will



that may exist. Relatives and friends in far-off places are written to or called, forgiveness is sought, apologies made and tensions released.

December 23, red: Today's discipline is to establish love and harmony among business associates and the public. It is the day for presenting gifts to fellow workers and customers and to honor employers and employees with gifts and appreciation. It is a time for settling all debts and disputes.

December 24, green: The spiritual discipline of day four is to draw forth the vibration of joy and harmony that comes from music, art, drama and dance. Family, relatives and friends gather before Ganesha to share their artistic gifts, discuss Hindu Dharma and make plans to bring more cultural refinements into the home.

December 25, orange: The discipline for this day is to bring forth love and harmony that comes from charity and religiousness. As the gifts are opened, one and all experience Ganesha's abundant, loving presence filling their home and hearts, inspiring them anew for the coming year.



Making Vadai

Spicy donuts to enjoy as a snack or with a festive meal

Preparation time: 4 hours
Cooking time: 40 minutes
Serves: 6-8
Equipment: A small wok or round-bottomed pan, a ladle and a serving dish.

Ingredients

1 cup urad dal, 1 onion, 2 green chilies, curry leaves, ghee, salt

Method

1. Soak the dal in water for 4 hours.
2. Drain and grind to a coarse paste.
3. Mince the onion and chilies.
4. Add to the dal with salt and curry leaves. Stir well.
5. To make each *vadai*, roll a small piece of dough into a ball and flatten it. *Vadais* are usually about 2 1/2" in diameter and may have a hole in the middle like a donut.
6. Deep fry the *vadai* in ghee until golden (about 5 minutes).

Tidbits About Pancha Ganapati

How did this festival begin? In 1985, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY magazine, conceived of and introduced Pancha Ganapati during the thirty days of the Markali Pillaiyar home festival. With five days of gift giving at the time of year when Christmas is widely celebrated, it offers Hindu families, especially in the West, a meaningful way to participate in the holiday season without compromising their Hindu values. Their children receive and give gifts just as do their non-Hindu friends. Adults can fulfill the season's social custom of sharing gifts and greeting cards, as well as accepting them from relatives, neighbors, friends and business associates.

How is the Hindu tone maintained?

While the festival occurs at Christmas time, Hindus celebrate Pancha Ganapati in a distinctly Hindu way, without Christmas trees, Santa Claus or symbols of other religions. Greeting cards are Indian in design and content, conveying Hindu wisdom from scripture. Hindu music and bhajans take the place of Christmas carols.

How is the home decorated? Lord Ganesha is depicted as coming from the forest; therefore, pine boughs, bamboo, palm fronds or banana leaves may be used. Durva grass, sugarcane, garlands of limes, *vadai* or sweet *mo-daka* enhance the home shrine. Flashing lights, oil lamps and colorful hanging ornaments are often added. After each puja, the sweets prepared for the day are given to the children.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus believe that even harsh karma—which comes in the form of difficult experiences—when faced in wisdom, can be the greatest catalyst for spiritual growth. The Hindu knows that when something happens that seems unfortunate or unjust, it is not God's punishment. It is the result of one's own actions in the past. Understanding the way karma works, Hindus seek to live a good and virtuous life through right thought, right speech and right action. This is called dharma.

FICTION: It is not true that Hinduism is alone in its belief in reincarnation. The doctrine is found in all other Indic religions—Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism—as well as indigenous faiths, including the Native Americans and the pagans of Europe. Even Christianity originally taught reincarnation, and some schools of Judaism still do. Today one-fourth of Americans believe in reincarnation. It is one of most widespread articles of faith on Earth.



To those with a pure heart, the gates of Vishnu's spiritual world are always open. But on a precious few days, it is said, that passage is open to all, allowing devotees to more easily reach Vaikunta, the abode of Lord

Vishnu, Supreme God to hundreds of millions of Hindus. This is the essence of Vaikunta Ekadashi, a festival marked by fasting, devotion and pilgrimage to famous temples, when devotees draw closer to God in a most personal way.

Who is Lord Vishnu?

In the Vaishnava sect of Hinduism Vishnu is the Supreme God, venerated as the all-pervading essence of all beings, the master of time, the One who supports, sustains and governs the universe and all elements within it. In the sacred *Puranas*, Vishnu is described as the color of dark blue clouds, having four arms, holding a lotus, mace, conch and a chakra. Through the ages, He manifests in several forms, or avatars, such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, to guide humans on the path of dharma. Vishnu's constant companion is the Goddess Lakshmi. He represents the potential and She the wealth of potential brought to fruition.

What is Vaikunta Ekadashi?

Ekadashi is the eleventh lunar day of every fortnight. Of the two dozen *ekadashis* in a year, Vaikunta



Ekadashi reigns supreme. It is known as Mokshada, "bestowing liberation." On this day, the doors to Vishnu's divine abode, called Vaikunta, are open wide to all who seek salvation, moksha. This occurs in the bright fortnight of December/January, the Hindu month of Mrigashira. According to mythology, devas and demons churned the Ocean of Milk for 1,000 years and, *amrita*, the nectar of immortality, appeared on this day.

What do Hindus do on Vaikunta Ekadashi?

Devotees maintain a total or partial fast and observe *mauna*, silence, while remembering Vishnu in prayer. While many Hindus fast on all *ekadashis*, Vaikunta Ekadashi is observed with utmost diligence and self-restraint. A common observance is to consume only water or milk.



What are the temple observances?

Devotees flock to Vishnu shrines, especially famous ones such as the Venkateshwara temples in Tirupati and Pittsburg, and the Ranganathar temple in Srirangam. In Sri-rangam the festival spans 21 days divided into morning and night observances. Lord Vishnu, adorned in diamond-studded armor, is brought to a 1,000-pillared hall through the northern gate, called *swarga vaasal*, "heaven's entrance," which is opened only this one time each year.

What else is celebrated around this time?

In the northern hemisphere, winter solstice occurs in this month, heralding longer, warmer days and agrarian prosperity. This transition to the year's fortuitous half is celebrated with beautiful patterns, called *rangoli*, drawn with colored rice flour on the floor outside homes. Hindus believe that at this time the divine celestials are most attentive to the pleas of mankind. Devotees rise early, perform ablutions and, throughout the month, visit temples with prayers in heart and gifts in hand.

TIDBITS ABOUT VAIKUNTA EKADASHI

What is the legend of Ekadashi? In an ancient story, Ekadashi is a *devi*, or angel, born of Vishnu's mind, a fierce defender of righteousness, a protectress of those in need. Strengthened by unflinching devotion to God Vishnu, she was feared by the forces of evil and ignorance. Vishnu offered her the boon of being rich, famous, powerful and beautiful in the world of mortals. But she declined, saying she wanted only to share her blessings with humans who fast and pray to Him on *ekadashi*. Vishnu granted her wish, decreeing that anyone worshipping Him by fasting on the eleventh day of the moon would be allowed access through the celestial gates. In the epic *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna relates Ekadashi's story to King Yudhishtira, praising her and recommending fasting as an ancient and effective spiritual practice.

How is the fast broken? The Ekadashi fast is normally broken the next lunar day, *dvadashi*, by partaking of fruit, herbs and milk. The Indian gooseberry, *amla*, known as a wonder food, is eulogized in the *Puranas* as the ideal nourishment to jump-start the system after a fast.

HINDUISM: FACT & FICTION

FACT: Science and mysticism have long blended in Hindu tradition. The ancient sages who wrote the scriptures also made observations on astronomy, time and mathematics. Long before Galileo, Copernicus and Newton, Hindus recorded knowledge of gravity, heliocentrism and other universal laws in treatises called *Siddhanta*. Hindu rishis further explored the connections between mind, body and the soul, evolving the sciences of yoga and ayurveda for a rewarding, beneficial life.

FICTION: Western scholars describe Hinduism as polytheistic. This is incorrect. While Hindu scriptures speak of many Gods—as many as 330 million—there is only one Supreme Being, which Hindus of various denominations and linguistic backgrounds worship by different names. The One Great God created lesser Divinities, suprahuman beings presiding over aspects of Creation, not unlike the archangels of Christianity. Hinduism is neither polytheistic nor pantheistic; its philosophy is rightly called panentheism, God in all things and yet beyond.



DOES RELIGIOUS FASTING MAKE SENSE?

Fasting in Hinduism indicates the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of spiritual gains. According to scripture, fasting helps create an attunement with the Absolute by establishing a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul. By fasting, the devout exercise control over their rioting senses and desires. It is a sacrifice made to the Self, by the self.

By turning within in meditation, they rein in the mind. Since the body is mostly composed of fluids, it is influenced by the phases of the moon, as is the mind. The rishis, ancient Hindu scientists, established these connections and recommended fasting and meditation based on the moon cycle, such as on *ekadashi*. This causes a natural slow down of the system and the opportunity to reconnect with one's deeper being.

Fasting breaks life's repetitious regimen and brings clarity, empowering the individual to resume normal activities with greater vigor and conviction.



Sankranti or Pongal

To Earth, a Festival of Thankfulness

Hindus acknowledge the sacredness of Earth and all life. Nature is a creative force worthy of respect, even veneration. Each year at harvest time, agrarian communities all over India celebrate this festival with enthusiastic abandon. They dance, fly kites, sing and exchange gifts in a grand thanksgiving celebration.



What is the nature of this festival?

Makara Sankranti is four days of giving thanks to four great forces of influence and protection: Indra, the giver of rain; Surya, the Sun; gracious cattle and beloved ancestors. This happy occasion is known as Pongal by Tamils, Pedha Panduga among the Telugus and Lohri by Punjabis. It begins on the day the sun enters Makara (Capricorn), between January 13 and 15. This is a special time of giving blankets, pumpkins, sugarcane and other items to the poor. Married women are honored, and gifts are given to newborn children.

What is done on the first day?

The day before festivities begin, Hindus thoroughly clean their homes, discarding unwanted, worn out or broken items and obtaining replacements for the year ahead. This clears away stale, negative energy and brings an influx of dynamic blessings into the home. It is a time for clearing the mind as well, to begin the year with focus and confidence. On this day, Indra, the celestial power of lightning and rain, is worshiped.

What happens on the second day?

Using colored rice flour, women draw patterns on the floor called *kolam* or *rangoli*, depicting the Moon and the Sun in a chariot. Prayers are directed to Surya, the Sun, with offerings of freshly harvested sugarcane and vegetables. The main event happens at sunrise when everyone gathers in a gaily decorated compound where freshly harvested rice is cooked

with milk in a new pot. In Tamil communities, the moment the pot boils over, all shout, "Pongalo Pongal!" ("It's boiling over!"). All watch to see whether the froth overflows toward the East, which auspiciously indicates abundance for the year ahead. Conches are sounded and children dance for joy. A portion of the boiled rice, the season's first food, is offered to Mother Earth as a gesture of gratitude, and to all creatures and nature spirits. The remainder is eaten by the families. Wearing new clothes, families visit one another, exchanging gifts and enjoying feasts.

What happens on the third day?

On the third day, Hindus offer thanks to cattle,

the farmer's gracious helpers. Bulls and cows are lovingly adorned with cowrie shells, embroidered shawls, colorful ropes and bells. They are fed sweet rice and sugar cane.

How is the final day celebrated?

On the fourth day, ancestors and wildlife are venerated. It is a day for picnic outings and family visits. Young girls and women receive blessings from older women for happiness and prosperity. Youth honor their elders. Brothers and sisters exchange gifts and express mutual respect and allegiance. Poets and their works are revered. In Tamil Nadu, it is also called Tiruvalluvar Day, in honor of the author of the famed ethical scripture *Tirukural*.

Tidbits About the Harvest Festival

Why is the harvest festival so important?

Marked as an inauspicious time, the months before the harvest are fraught with anxiety for farmers and for society. All celebrations, such as weddings, are held off. Months of toil in the fields and uncertainty over the harvest come to an end with Makara Sankranti. The harvest brings prosperity. Agrarian communities all over India celebrate this festival with enthusiastic abandon. Once the crops are harvested and cash flows in, communities proceed to plan weddings and other rites of passage. Over one quarter of the *Rig Veda* is devoted to praises of Indra, the lord of the elements, the exalted Lord of the devas and God of rain, who is essential to the yield.

Are there other festivals during this month?

In the Bhogi bonfire, communities heap and burn organic, agricultural waste accompanied by festive dancing to drums. During Kummi, a folk dance is performed

by children, twirling and clapping around a pot to simple poetry chanted in a sing-song manner. For Gombe Ellu, children carry dolls as they visit neighbors with offerings of *ellu bella* (a "trail-mix" made of desiccated coconut, jaggery, sesame seeds and peanuts). They give and receive treats, learning from a small age the value of community sharing.

Sakkarai Pongal

This recipe for sumptuous sweet rice is from Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 55 minutes

Serves: 4

Equipment: a medium pot, a skillet and a big spoon

Ingredients

2 cups rice, 1/4 cup raisins, 2 tbsp mung dal, 1 tsp cardamom powder, 2/3 cup sugar, 3/4 cup freshly grated coconut (or frozen grated coconut), 1/4 cup cashews, 1 tbsp ghee

Method

1. Roast mung dal in a dry skillet until it is golden brown.
2. Boil rice and mung dal in five cups of water for thirty minutes, until the rice is cooked.
3. Add sugar and coconut and stir well. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Fry raisins and cashews in ghee until nuts are light brown, then add them to the rice along with the cardamom powder.
5. Stir rice well & remove from heat.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hinduism places great emphasis on giving. *Dana*, charity or giving, is one of the tenets of yoga. Hindus are encouraged to give to the poor, to holy men and to religious institutions. The *Tirukural* inquires, "The benevolent expect no return for their dutiful giving. How can the world ever repay the rain cloud?" Dashamamsha, or tithing, giving one-tenth of income to the religious institution you are affiliated to, is an ancient Hindu practice.

FICTION: It is commonly thought that all Hindus believe that God occasionally incarnates as an earthly being, called an avatar. In fact, this doctrine is specific only to some denominations and traditions.



K. SHANMUGAM

Thai Pusam

Honoring the God of Yoga

By many names we known Him. He is Murugan, the beautiful one. He is Dandapani, the God of yoga who guides us on the path to Self Realization. He is Kumara, the God of child-like love, holding steady the higher realms of creation. He is Karttikeya, the God of war, who

arrives to end all conflicts with piercing wisdom and swift action. During January/February, the Tamil month of Thai, millions gather to worship and honor Him with fervor. In North America, He has temples in Arizona, Maryland, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and California.



K. SHANMUGAM

How is Thai Pusam celebrated?

Devotees prepare themselves through prayer and fasting. On the day of the festival, many shave their heads, an act of sacrifice that symbolizes humility and the surrender of vanity. They undertake a pilgrimage to a place where Thai Pusam is being celebrated, usually a temple, while performing acts of devotion and penance. The most notable practices are the carrying of *kavadis* ("burdens"). Thai Pusam is observed in the Tamil month of Thai, between January 15 and February 15, when the Pushya star cluster, called Pusam in Tamil, rises with the full moon.

What is kavadi?

Kavadi is an offering carried by a devotee during a grand parade and offered to Murugan at the destination. The most common, *pal kudam*, is a pot filled with milk carried over one's head. Less common but more impressive are the bamboo structures formed like a peacock or chariot, ornamented with

symbols evocative of Murugan. Some are heavy structures many feet tall and covered in peacock feathers. For weeks before the festival, *kavadi* carriers observe celibacy, take only fresh, light foods, while striving to think continuously of the Deity. Just before the sacred walk, they take a vow and pray for boons, often pledging some form of sacrifice or change in behavior. During the ordeal, many experience states of euphoria or trance.

What is the purpose of kavadi?

Austerity strengthens willpower, clears the mind of regrets, resolves problems and brings closeness to God. Devotees believe that God will make any burden seem weightless as long as their faith is firm. *Kavadi* is the highest form of offering, a gift to God of personal effort and sacrifice.

What is Thai Pusam's special significance?

This festival celebrates the moment in sacred legends when Lord Murugan, as the commander-in-chief of the divine army, defeated, using various spiritual powers, a mighty demon named Taraka who was wreaking havoc in all the worlds.

Where is Thai Pusam celebrated?

This festival is widely celebrated among communities of Tamil peoples in South India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Fiji, South Africa, Singapore, Mauritius, the Caribbean and North America. In South India, thousands walk barefoot for days to Palani Hills carrying colorful *kavadis*. The largest celebrations take place in Malaysia, where it is a public holiday. The temple at Batu Caves, near Kuala Lumpur, attracts a million devotees on that day.

Tidbits About Thai Pusam

What other acts of penance are observed? After fasting and following other spiritual preparations, carriers of *kavadi* may ask a priest to pierce their bodies with small spears, replicas of Lord Murugan's

vel. Other famous acts of penance include walking on hot coals and wearing nail shoes. It is considered a miracle of faith that fire walkers suffer no burns, and piercings do not bleed or leave scars.



K. SHANMUGAM

Why are these austerities performed?

Fasting, head-shaving and *kavadi* are acts of devotion and penance to atone for misdeeds, earn spiritual merit and subdue the ego. Such austerities soften and relieve the burdens of karma, guilt, regret and troublesome memories. Through sacred rites and intense prayers, the Deity's soothing blessings are received into the nerve system of the devotee. Penance, sincerely performed with the help of the angelic worlds, heals mental-emotional wounds and grants release from suffering.



K. SHANMUGAM

God Loves a Parade

Hindu festivals often feature a grand parade in which the Deity is taken through the streets. The procession attracts huge crowds, energizing devotees and bringing God's blessings out to the city from the confines of the temple. It is not the temple's main Deity image that is paraded, but a smaller statue or symbol. An ornate chariot built of wood and silver is pulled with huge ropes by throngs of devotees. The procession in Kuala Lumpur begins in the heart of the city and proceeds 15 kilometers—a slow, 8-hour journey—to Batu Caves. There the Deity is carried up the flight of 272 steps to the Murugan shrine inside the cave.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Devotees who receive piercings and undergo other self-inflicting austerities during Thai Pusam do not bleed, suffer infections or experience prolonged pain after the events. Fasting, herbal salves, celibacy and a trance-like, exalted state mitigate human suffering commonly experienced when such practices are carried out unsupervised. Those who express devotion in such extreme ways are accorded reverential respect by the community.

FICTION: Many people believe that karma means "fate," a preordained destiny over which one has no control. This is untrue. Karma is the process of action and reaction on all levels—physical, mental and spiritual. We each have the power to remold our future by the way we live now. If we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil.



Mahasivaratri

Siva's Great Night

Mahasivaratri is the most important festival dedicated to Lord Siva. This holy day is observed by millions of Hindus all over the world. It is one of Hinduism's most esoteric holy days, when yoga practices, mantras and meditation take the devotee closer to God's essence within the core of himself. Hindus typically fast, maintain silence and stay up all night to perform spiritual practices, such as worshiping, chanting and singing. In some regions, devotees visit as many Siva temples as they can on this night.

Who is Siva?

For hundreds of millions of Hindus Siva is the Supreme Being, the absolute One God who both transcends creation and pervades it—thus existing as our own innermost essence. Siva is the powerful Deity whose energetic dance creates, sustains and dissolves the universe in endless cycles. He is the master yogi delving into unfathomable mysteries, the supreme ascetic, the prime mystic, the Light behind all light, the Life within all life. Siva is often called Mahadeva, "Great Being of Light," for He created other, lesser Gods such as Ganesha and Karttikeya. Although Siva is usually depicted as male, in reality God and the Gods are beyond gender and form, as depicted by His half-male, half-female form, Ardhanarishvara. Parvati, regarded as Siva's consort in village Hinduism,



HINDUISM TODAY

is mystically understood as His manifest energy, inseparable from Him. The ancient *Tirumantiram* scripture says of Siva, "Himself creates. Himself preserves. Himself destroys. Himself conceals. Himself all of this He does and then grants liberation—Himself the all-pervading Lord."

What happens on Mahasivaratri?

Many Hindus perform an all-night vigil, plunging the soul into its own essence, led by Siva, the supreme yogi, who is both the guide and the goal of the search. Staying awake through the night is a sacrifice and a break from life's normal routine, a time out of time to be with God within, to reach for the realization of our true, immortal Self. Siva is known as Abhisheka Priya, "He who loves sacred ablutions," and thus many temples and home shrines have water always dripping on the Sivalinga. On this special night, Sivalingas are bathed with special substances, sometimes several times. Mahasivaratri occurs on the night before the new moon in February/March.

What is the Sivalinga?

Linga means "mark, token or sign." A Sivalinga, representing Siva, is found in virtually all of His temples. The Sivalinga is the simplest and most ancient symbol



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of the Divine. It is especially evocative of Parasiva, God beyond all forms and qualities, the unmanifested Absolute. Sivalingas are commonly made of stone, but may also be of metal, precious gems, crystal, wood, earth or even transitory materials like sand or ice. Ardent devotees make special Sivalingas to worship during Mahasivaratri.

Is there a special mantra for Siva?

Namah Sivaya is among the foremost Vedic mantras. It means "adoration to Siva" and is called the Panchakshara, or "five-letters." The five elements, too, are embodied in this ancient formula for invocation. Na is earth, Ma is water, Si is fire, Va is air, and Ya is ether, or space.

Tidbits About Mahasivaratri

☀️ **What is holy ash?** Holy ash is a sacrament that is dear to devotees of Siva. Taken from sacred fires, it purifies and blesses those who wear it. This fine, white powder is worn on the forehead as a reminder of the temporary nature of the physical body and the urgency to strive for spiritual attainment and closeness to God.

☀️ **What is the special offering to Siva?** Hindus believe that offering bilva leaves (*Aegle marmelos*) on Mahasivaratri is most auspicious. Legend tells of a hunter who was chased by a tiger. Scrambling up a thorny tree, he plucked and dropped its leaves to stay alert. The tree was a bilva. The leaves happened to fall on a Sivalinga, and it was the night of Sivaratri. That all-night worship of God, though inadvertent, earned the hunter liberation from rebirth.

Siva accepts devotees irrespective of their faults and foibles, forgiving man's cognizant and innocent mistakes.

☀️ **What is the Kumbha Mela?** The Kumbha Mela is a grand festival held every few years in rotation at four places where several sacred rivers converge: Haridwar, Prayag, Nasik and Ujjain. The largest melas, at Haridwar and Prayag, fall in January to April and often include Mahasivaratri. Devotees come from near and far to immerse themselves in the holy waters, with prayers for purification and spiritual liberation on their lips. In 2001, the Kumbha Mela at Prayag, held on the river bank, was attended by more than 60 million people. It was the biggest human gathering held on Earth, seven times the population of New York City.



DREAMSTIME

Fasting & Silence

While virtually every Hindu festival comes with a sumptuous list of foods to feast on, during Mahasivaratri most Hindus fast. A spiritual practice found in almost all of the world's religions, fasting calms the physical, mental and emotional energies, helping the devotee draw nearer to the ineffable Self within. While the most strict fast on nothing but water; others permit themselves fruits, milk or rice. Many observe silence on this night, thinking of nothing but God. Silence, known in Sanskrit as mauna, quiets the demands of the mind and body, bringing forth spiritual clarity.

In Hinduism, God is not separate from creation. A virtuous life and certain techniques, such as yoga and ascetic practices, allow a person to remove the veil that makes us think of ourselves as separate from Him.

Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus undergo numerous traditional rites of passage at critical junctures throughout life. These ceremonies invoke divine blessings for the individual and help bind him with his community as he advances on the path of virtue. Name-giving, first feeding, commencement of learning, coming of age, marriage and cremation are primary examples.

FICTION: It is commonly believed that rituals are mandatory. In fact, there are no absolute requirements within Hinduism. Each devotee is free to practice his faith according to his family tradition and personal preferences.



Holi

Splashed with Colors of Friendship

Holi is wild and raucous, a frolic of friendly playfulness. During Holi, India's streets are overtaken by crowds awash with colored powder. Not only clothes, but faces, arms and hair are smeared and sprayed with every color of the rainbow. People sing, dance, play,

hug each other and smile with such child-like joy that it makes one wonder where so much happiness comes from! No religious festival in the world compares to Holi in terms of engaging young and old alike. It is a celebration of love, forgiveness, hope and just plain fun.

What is Holi?

Holi is a community's exuberant expression of joy to welcome the warmth of spring. In a reflection of nature's abundance, Hindus celebrate with bursts of color, camaraderie and shared abandon. It begins on Purnima, full moon day, in the Hindu month of Phalguni (February/March) and lasts for as long as 16 days.

How does the festival start?

Many communities create a central bonfire on the night before Holi, starting with kindling and logs and adding organic debris as they clean up their property. The fire symbolizes the torching of negative or troublesome experiences and memories. An effigy of Holika, a demoness personifying negativity, is consigned to the flames, and freshly harvested barley and oats are offered. The embers are collected to light sacred fires, and the ashes are used to mark the forehead as a blessing.

When does the color fun begin?

On the day of Holi, people celebrate by playing, dancing and running in the streets. Water pistols are filled with colored water and squirted on family, friends and strangers alike. Dye powders and water balloons are a big part of the play. The wise wear old clothes, usually white, in anticipation of the mess! Virtually anything goes, including ribald humor, practical jokes and sexual teasing—all excused with the saying, "Don't mind, it's Holi!" (Hindi: *Bura na mano, Holi hai.*) Men are at the playful mercy of women, who dance with them and even dress them in drag. Especially in North India, people celebrate with abandon, even splashing color on their homes as a prelude to the more sober custom of renewing the paint with shell-based white. Deities and images of ancestors are hand-painted and placed in

beautiful altars. Dramatic events feature devotional songs and the retelling of the love epic of Radha and Krishna. Bonds are renewed, particularly among in-laws and the extended family. Etiquette on Holi requires that one accept all overtures with an open heart, burying grievances to begin relationships afresh. People of all walks of life mingle and greet, applying vermilion on each other's foreheads in an uninhibited exchange of goodwill.

What are the delicacies of this festival?

Special sweet and savory treats including *mathri*, *puran poli* and *vadai* are made. Many communities make an intoxicating, cooling drink, called *thandai*, made of purified water, sugar, seeds of watermelon, muskmelon and lotus, along with nuts, cardamom, fennel, white pepper, saffron and rose petals.



Making Safe, Natural Colors

Dyes made of toxic chemicals are too often used during Holi. The food-based recipes below, along with edible food coloring, offer safe alternatives for all colors.

RED: Soak red pomegranate rind in water overnight. A pinch of edible gypsum mixed with turmeric powder in water gives a bright red. Soak red hibiscus flowers in water overnight.

YELLOW: Turmeric powder makes a terrific yellow.

BROWN: Soak betel nut in water overnight and dilute as necessary. Or boil tea or coffee in water.

PURPLE: Boil blueberries in an iron vessel and let stand overnight.

MAGENTA: Slice or grate one beet root. Leave overnight in water. Dilute as needed for different shades.

GREEN: Purée spinach, coriander or mint leaves in water. Strain and use.

Tidbits About Holi

What is the meaning behind the bonfire? Love, positive values and goodness are celebrated on Holi. Their triumphs over divisiveness and negative forces have been reinforced in legends, such as that of Holika and her brother Prahlad. The famous king Hiranyakashipu had earned a boon that made him virtually indestructible. Blinded by this power, he thought he was God, the only being worthy of worship. His young son Prahlad was devoted to Lord Vishnu and refused to obey his father. Infuriated, the king devised the cruellest punishments. In one attempt, Prahlad's evil aunt Holika, who possessed the power to withstand fire, tricked him into climbing a burning pyre with her. Prahlad's love for true Divinity protected him from the flames. Holika burned while Prahlad lived. The bonfire of Holi is symbolic of this victory of good over evil.

How did the frolicking with color originate? Legend has it that Krishna noticed one day how much lighter Radha's complexion was than His own. His mother playfully suggested that He smear Radha's cheeks with color to make Her look like Him, which Krishna did. The strong-willed Radha gleefully retaliated, and a merry chaos ensued. Another legend has it that Krishna celebrated this festival with His friends and the gopis. They danced and frolicked, filling the air with color in a joyous welcome of spring.

Is this a romantic occasion? The festive dancing and camaraderie create the perfect environment for matrimonial alliances. Young people find mates, and families formally seal marital agreements during these days.



Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus worship and celebrate the Divine with unparalleled variety and fervor. Dance, song, prayer, meditation, processions, pilgrimage, bathing, painting, symbols and rituals are all valid ways of connecting with Divinity. This is living testimony to the existence of many paths within this ancient faith, all leading to God. Each person finds his own path among the many laid out by gurus and sages. To the Hindu, spiritual life is meant to be lived joyously, as Holi demonstrates.

FICTION: Hinduism is rich with stories of the Gods and their wives. Yet, on a deeper, philosophical level, it is widely regarded as a fiction that the Gods are married. The Supreme Being and the Gods are neither male nor female and are therefore not married.



Rama Navami

Birthday of Rama, the Ideal Man

An incarnation of God, an ideal man, dutiful son and just king: these are just a few ways to describe Lord Rama, an exemplar of honor, reverence, self-control and duty. He fought battles, became king, married a Goddess, traveled far and befriended

exotic beings who were steadfast in their loyalty and courage. Rama Navami is the celebration of His birthday, when Hindus honor and remember Him with devotional singing, dramatic performance and non-stop recitation of His remarkable life story, the *Ramayana*.

When is Rama's birth celebrated?

Rama was born on *navami*, the ninth day of the waxing moon, in the Indian month of Chaitra (late March or early April). Sometimes the festival is observed for nine days before or after *navami*.

How do Hindus observe Rama Navami?

Devotees fast or eat only fruit or special food offerings prepared for the day. They participate in non-stop reading of the 24,000-verse epic *Ramayana*, at home or in a temple. Images or statues of baby Rama are placed in cradles and rocked by devotees. Homes resound with singing. In the evening, crowds attend Ramalila, in which storytellers and dance-drama troupes depict the *Ramayana*. It is common to remain awake the whole night, engaged in devotional practices.

Devotees contribute generously to temples and charitable organizations. They make buttermilk and a lime drink called *panaka*, serving them to the public without charge. Some temples make *khoa*, a sweet made from thickened milk. This festival is especially popular in Uttar Pradesh, where Rama's kingdom of Ayodhya is located.

Is the festival observed at temples?

Many temples hold grand celebrations on this day, especially those with shrines for Lord Rama, His wife Sita, His brother Lakshmana and His loyal friend Hanuman, Lord of Monkeys. *Panaka* and garlands of the sacred tulsi plant are offered as families pray for "Rama-Rajya," a time when dharma will once again be upheld in the world. In South India, the day is celebrated as the marriage anniversary of Rama and Sita. A ceremonial wedding is held at temples with great fanfare.

Why is Rama so popular?

Rama is one of the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu. He is revered as the perfect husband and ruler, who held duty to king and country above all else. He held strong to his ideals in the face of tremendous trials, including exile from His kingdom and separation from His beloved wife, Sita, herself an embodiment of virtue and truth. He is honored and glorified for His unshakable adherence to dharma, righteousness. The story of Rama is deeply influential and popular in the societies of the Indian subcontinent and across Southeast Asia.

What is the story of Rama?

A tale of love and separation, the *Ramayana*

has moved the hearts of millions of Hindus over the ages. To honor a promise made by his father, King Dasaratha, prince Rama abandons His claim to the throne and spends 14 years in exile. Wife Sita and brother Lakshmana join him in exile, a time of perils and tribulations. Sita is abducted by Ravana, the monarch of Lanka. After a long and arduous search, Rama discovers Sita's whereabouts, with the help of Hanuman. A colossal war ensues against Ravana's armies. In a duel of majestic proportions, powerful and magical beings wield mighty weaponry in formidable battles. Rama slays Ravana and liberates Sita. Having completed His exile, Rama returns to be crowned king, loved by one and all.

Tidbits About Rama

Who wrote the epic? Some 25 centuries ago, a sage ordered a thief to sit under a tree and chant "ma-ra" until he returned. Years passed, and an ant-hill covered the man, who had lost himself to the chant. The sage returned and broke the anthill, naming the thief Valmiki, meaning "from an anthill." Inspired by his expanded awareness, Valmiki

immortalized Rama by composing the *Ramayana*, a work unmatched in poetic excellence and longevity. *Shri Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas in Hindi and the *Kamba Ramayanam* by the poet Kambar in Tamil stand alongside Valmiki's epic in Sanskrit.

Who was Sita? Sita was a powerful, gifted, beautiful woman, utterly devoted to her husband. Found in the fields as a babe by King Janaka, Sita was raised a princess. She walked alongside Rama in exile. When abducted by Ravana, she was unshakable in her faith that her husband would rescue her. She walked through fire to prove her purity. To prevent further slander, Rama sent her away to the forest. She patiently bore separation from her husband a second time and bore twins named Lav and Kush. When they were reunited with their father, she commanded Mother Earth to swallow her. The Earth split open and Sita disappeared.



Panaka

Sweet Indian Limeaide

Ingredients

½ cup of jaggery or brown sugar, 4 cups water, juice of one lime, 1½ tsp of grated fresh ginger, 1 tsp ghee or oil, a pinch of cardamom powder

Method

Mix ingredients and serve cold.

Spicy Buttermilk

Ingredients

2 cups buttermilk (or yoghurt), 2 cups water, 3 curry leaves, chopped coriander leaves (cilantro), 1 finely chopped green chilli, 1½ tsp ginger powder, 1 tsp mustard seeds, 1 pinch asafoetida, salt to taste

Method

Heat oil in saucepan and add mustard seeds; allow it to splutter, then add curry leaves, ginger, green chilies and asafoetida, stirring vigorously. Mix with remaining ingredients and beat until smooth.



Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hinduism has more than one sacred scripture, with several books considered revered or holy. While all Hindus revere the sanctity of the primordial *Vedas*, distinct sects recognize scripture that is most aligned with their theological beliefs, but not universal to all Hindus. Examples are the *Agamas*, *Ramayana*, *Puranas* and *Mahabharata*.

FICTION: Some deride Hinduism as primitive because certain of its Deities have animal features. Actually, most religions share this characteristic. The Greek God Pan and the Egyptian Deities Anubis and Horus are examples. In Christianity and Judaism, the biblical prophet Ezekiel describes the angels known as cherubim as having the faces of a lion, an ox, an eagle and a man, with the feet of a calf and four wings.

Hindu Heritage Endowment

MOTHER OF THREE CREATES FUND FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

When Vinaya Alahan joined Gurudeva on pilgrimage in the Caribbean in 2001, she asked for his blessings to start a fund at the Hindu Heritage Endowment supporting the distribution of educational materials produced by Positive Discipline, a kind-but-firm approach to child-rearing that he hoped would give Hindu parents a practical alternative to both physical punishment and indulgent permissiveness.

“He had heard through his website about the harsh physical treatment some children received at home,” the mother-of-three said. “He started searching for a way of raising children consistent with the Hindu commitment to nonviolence.” His child-rearing concerns surfaced publicly in the July 1998 issue of HINDUISM TODAY which carried the feature story “Sparing the Child, Should Corporal Punishment End?” by Julie Rajan. About the same time, Gurudeva discovered the writings of Jane Nelson, PhD, author of the Positive Discipline books and educational tapes. The more Alahan, a resident of Des Moines, Iowa, learned about Positive Discipline, the more she wished she had known about it during hard-scrabble times when she was raising her three boys as a single parent.

“I tried to raise my kids as positively as possible,” she said. “But I feel Positive Discipline goes a step beyond the tools I had.” To make sure other parents have those tools, she has created the Positive Discipline Fund at the Hindu Heritage Endowment to make Nelson’s materials easily available. Positive Discipline offers parents general guidance and specific step-by-step instructions that avoid violence of any kind without surrendering to the demands of tantrum-throwing kids. “Positive Discipline is not just tradition based,” she explained. “It uses reason and sound psychology.” And, she adds, it works far better than the short-term behavior control and emotional release a parent gets from smacking a kid’s bottom or meekly capitulating to a child’s clamorous wishes. “Gurudeva introduced me to Jane Nelson’s writings,” she said. “They seemed very organized, and very consistent with his philosophy and with Hindu spirituality of the best sort.”

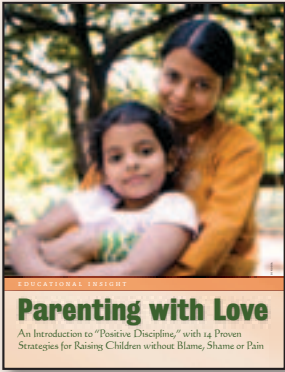
The January / February / March 2009 issue of HINDUISM TODAY summarized the philosophy and techniques of Positive Discipline. At its core is the ability to connect emotionally with children, treat them with respect, listen to them, provide them with social skills, work with them on solutions to problems, and increase their capabilities. Many Hindu parents, especially those who remember the response to their own childhood misdeeds as swift and painful, may find it odd to engage a five-year-old who demands dessert before dinner in an exploration of his feelings. But the outcome is long-term and worth the effort, according to Dr. Nelson.

Though the approach is gentle, the message remains fair, clear and firm. “Children need to learn that they can’t always have what they want,” Nelson writes. “What do they learn from this? That they are capable, that they can be resilient, that they can survive delayed gratification.” Vinaya Alahan discovered Hinduism in much the same way she learned about Positive Discipline, through her interest in finding a better way. Raised in Clarksville , Iowa, she was curious about other religions while a teenager. Her town library had nothing on Hinduism, and it wasn’t until she was in her twenties that she learned about Gurudeva through a Yoga teacher in Minneapolis in 1974. Of her creating the Positive Discipline Fund (fund #32) at HHE, she says. “It’s a small thing I’m able to do. I see it as enlightened self interest. Everyone gets better if the world gets better.”



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The Positive Discipline Endowment has helped fund Parenting with Love

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Darma & Shivali Satgunasingam	75.00	
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Michael Zimmermann	7.50	
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Rajendra Giri	612.00	
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Anonymous	42.00	
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Total	177,881.52	

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Sukanta Caremben	13.15	
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Patudeva Sivaceyon	22.76	
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Kirtideva Peruman	21.01	
Puvaneswary Roberts	50.00	
Egamburam Sinsamy	107.73	
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	22.76	
Patudeva Sivaceyon	22.76	
Hemavalli Sivalingam	2.65	
Potriyan Sivanathan	2.85	
Javanya Skanda	17.56	
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Potriyan Sivanathan	7.07	
Uma Sivanathan	362.00	
Girish Skanda	175.70	
Siven Veerasamy	32.32	
Sharad Wagle	320.00	
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Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	
Anonymous	1,008.00	
Kannan Srikanth	1,000.00	
Anonymous	500.00	
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Total	4,023.57	

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Aran Sendan	500.00	
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Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
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Anonymous	151.00	
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Alex Ruberto	45.00	
Aran Sambandar	33.00	
Nanthakumar Satgunasingam	108.00	
Thanaletchmi Umamaheswaran	76.73	
Vayudeva Varadan	63.00	
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Udayan Care Endowment Fund		
Savithri Sundaresan	108.00	

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Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	5.00	
Alex Ruberto	60.00	
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20	
Total	181.75	

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Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00	
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00	
Total	266.55	

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Pathmini Saravanapavan	432.00	

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		
Bala Sivaceyon	68.34	

Kerala Temple Trust		
Vidya Anderson	10.50	

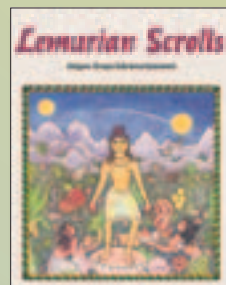
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I am the Power
in the Vel
of righteousness.

I am the Light
in the six pointed Star
that illumines the world.

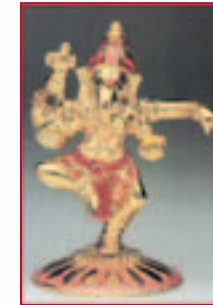
I am the Compassion
in the Eyes
of Murugan.

I am Siva-
the Ocean of
undivided essence

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	23-25	Austin, TX
	27	El Paso, TX
	29-30	Tucson, AZ
May	1-2	Tucson, AZ
	4-5	Sedona, AZ
	7-11	Los Angeles, CA
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	20-23	Seattle, WA
	24-26	Portland, OR
June	3-6	Boulder, CO
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	14-17	Fairfield, IA
	18-20	Chicago, IL
	22	Cincinnati, OH
	24-27	Columbus, OH
	27-29	Cleveland, OH
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	7-11	Washington, DC
	12-13	Philadelphia, PA
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Born into a traditional Hindu lineage of astrologers in South India, Chakrapani began his training at an early age and enjoyed associations with many of India's most revered and celebrated saints and sages. With over 45 years of experience, his depth of knowledge and unique understanding of how astrological principles apply to different cultures are sought out by people from all over the world. For more information and a schedule of his upcoming itinerary, please contact:

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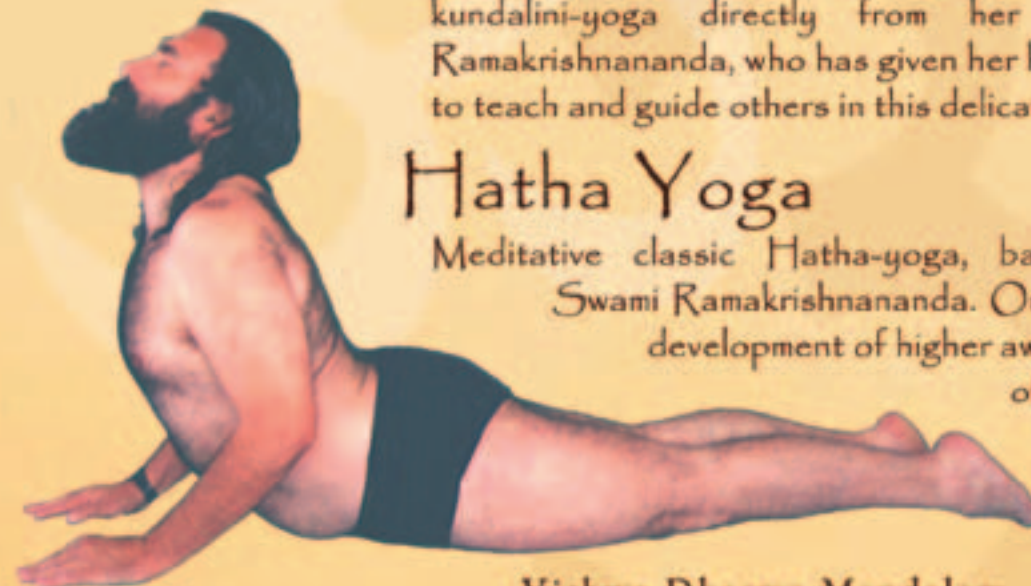
Swami Ramananda, who guides the meditation, studied kundalini-yoga directly from her spiritual master, Swami Ramakrishnananda, who has given her his blessing and authorization to teach and guide others in this delicate wisdom. Tuesday at 8:30 pm

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DIGITAL DHARMA

DIGITAL PUJAS

Web Streaming God's Grace from India to the World

By MADHURI SHEKAR, LOS ANGELES

WHEN ARIVUDAI NAMBI WAS living in Boca Raton, Florida, in 1996, he found himself in a predicament. He had just bought a new car and wished to perform a puja for it. However, there was no temple in the area. He wound up driving to Miami and having the ceremony performed at the home of a Hindu priest.

This experience impelled Mr. Nambi to found EPrarthana.com, the virtual puja service, in 2000. Based in Chennai, India, the company brings to the Internet the ancient custom of conducting pujas, *archanas* and other ceremonies at temples on behalf of devotees. For a fee of just US\$9, customers can order an archana online by specifying their desired South Indian temple, Deity and other necessary details. A company agent has the service conducted on the customer's behalf, and the company sees that the *prasada* and other offerings are mailed to the client.

Several other virtual puja services are now available, as well as online donation portals, such as the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam's e-hundi service (www.ttdsevaonline.com/ehundi/eHundi.aspx). Sites like Saranam.com and E-Pooja.in perform temple services in South India, while Kalighat.net specializes in North Indian temples.

In addition to these surrogate puja services, devotees around the world can also witness temple ceremonies through live-streaming and on-demand video in the comfort of their homes. One of the more popular live-streaming websites is E-Darshan.org, which broadcasts videos from over a dozen temples in South India. For those who do not wish to miss a live broadcast, the site's Twitter feed (www.twitter.com/livedarshan) provides instant updates to followers.

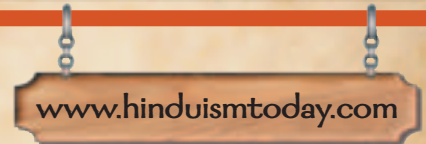
Such services are expanding and becoming more popular. Mr. Karthikraj, founder of E-Darshan.org, estimates that around half of his site's visitors are from India, while the rest are scattered around the world. Mr. Venkatesh Mayakoothan of Chennai turned to



E-Darshan.org when his mother was unable to visit the Kapaaleeshwar temple. The webcast made it seem "like the Goddess Herself came to our home."

Mr. Arun Gurjale of Annandale, Virginia, tells how EPrarthana.com helped his Hindu community. "The website proved invaluable when a friend suddenly fell ill with leukemia. The whole community was very worried, so we organized a 14-day puja at the Vaideeshwaran temple over the Internet. It was a difficult time, and the people behind [EPrarthana](http://EPrarthana.org) were an enormous help." In addition to *prasada*, the company routinely sends extra gifts—such as silver coins, audio CDs of shlokas, and DVDs of the rituals being performed—to loyal customers.

Mr. Gurjale's mother, Ms. Alamelu, is even more effusive in her praise. "I have been living away from home for 25 years. Services like these are marvelous. When you see the DVDs of the magnificent rituals, even those who do not have bhakti will be inspired to believe."



Clockwise from left: E-Darshan.org inaugurates video services at the Vekkaiammman temple in Trichy, Tamil Nadu. Founder, Mr. Karthikraj (left most in the photo), streams a live feed in the temple office. Outside the temple a bright banner proudly announces the new services. EPrarthana.com will take your order from anywhere in the world.

